

The Dog Days (are over)

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The Dog Days (are over)

by [pathicsoul](#)

Summary

After escaping The Academy, Tommy and Dream make a promise to survive.

Or, two brothers learn to live again.

Notes

Run for your children, for your sisters and brothers
Leave all your love and your longing behind
You can't carry it with you if you want to survive

The dog days are over
The dog days are done

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [There's Blood in your Web, Theseus \(wipe it out\)](#) by [spookyserpent](#)

Survival

His brown hair falls in front of his eyes, and when he pulls the long locks of hair behind his ears, he almost cannot recognize himself. A large scar is seen, and so are the dark shadows under his eyes. He will get a nose earring soon, it was one of the first things he wanted to do when they left.

But first, Dream will cut his hair. So, he is a little less recognizable, and so they will not get caught.

The Academy will find them, sooner or later. But Dream and he was the best of their classes. They made a promise a couple of years ago, that once they left, they would not have to return.

Dream returns with a pair of scissors he has found. He grimaces.

Gradually, the boy's hair falls. They are both silent during the process, the only sound being the metal cutting into the matted hair, and Dream's shoes against the marble flooring as he moves around to get the best angles to cut. If there was a sound from their small living room apartment, or outside their door, they would hear.

He did not spend six years (twelve for Dream) at The Academy for nothing.

Dream eventually places the scissors on the tabletop, after he has finished. The boy's hair is significantly shorter, and his face is no longer covered. A bleach bottle is taken out. Soon, his hair will be blond.

The boy stares at his face afterward. He almost cannot recognize himself.

But he does. His name is Theseus - now Tommy, and he escaped The Academy. He is not safe.

He must continue. He must persist.

Theseus - *Tommy* - must survive.

Tommy can hold his breath for six minutes underwater. Seven at his best.

His life flashes between the minutes of drowning.

One minute. He faintly distinguishes a life before. He remembers a mother, a father. He remembers the feeling of love.

Two minutes. There are twenty-nine other children with him. He is told they are his new brothers and sisters. They are this family; he writes on rows until his fingers are numb.

Three minutes. He holds a knife for the first time and is now familiar with going to bed starving.

He is taught that this is survival, and he must be three steps ahead to leap.

Four minutes. They learn to use guns and shoot blindfolded. They shout words in classrooms until the teachings are engraved into their souls. The siblings that cannot keep up are taken away. He does not see them again.

Five minutes. He notices the classroom, once of thirty students, now reduced to twenty. Sometimes, he can hear his brothers and sisters' voices and see their smiles in his sleep. Their failure is his success. Flowers are planted by unmarked stone. Soon, they wilt.

Six minutes. He understands that he must not be a second behind or a step too late. He fights for himself, for his future. He fights to survive. He teaches himself to persist, to allow the memories of his dead siblings to be a reminder of a possible fate.

Seven minutes – and urging arms force him upwards from the water. He gasps for air and can no longer feel his heart.

Tommy drowns in his sleep. For longer than seven minutes. He drowns in the previous faces of his siblings and the blood, sweat, and cold tears of his past.

There is a boy with salt-colored eyes. His name is Finn, and he does not make it past the anechoic chamber. There is also Lucifer, a boy who had once shared a piece of bread with Tommy, who had died in his sleep. Two flowers had been planted for them.

Strong arms do not pull him up, this time, as he drowns. Tommy wakes himself up, gasping for breaths and his heart racing. He cannot panic; he is not weak he must remind himself.

Tommy stumbles out of bed, grabbing the doorframe. He clutches his stomach, where under his plain shirt is a litter of bruises and stitches. Dream stands in the kitchen, staring at the wall opposite him rather intently.

The two boys do not say anything, as Tommy sits down. They don't need to, as Dream has heard him from the hallway. They are trapped inside their minds momentarily; Tommy burying his head in his arms while Dream just stares.

Dream is the first one to speak. "We can go explore the town if you would like today. I need to find a job." Because the money he has stolen will last them a couple of months. If Tommy had followed every part of the plan, they would have collected more.

Tommy squeezes his eyes closed and wills himself to forget. "Sounds good," he mutters under his breath.

"Tommy—" Dream's voice turns soft. It is sudden and strange because Tommy is not used to a lack of harshness in his tone which was present at The Academy. "We'll be okay. I promised you before, did I not?"

"You did," Tommy nods his head, but he's hesitant. "What time are we leaving?"

Fall results in colorful trees and cleaner air. Lighter skies, and preparation for the cold nights of Winter. It means layering, thick jackets, and long socks.

Tommy and Dream go to a local clothes store first. Tommy's eyes dart around the unfamiliarity, whereas Dream's experience allows them to reach the clothes aisle rather quickly. He tells him, of the one mission that occurred at the back of a Walmart.

Dream drops sweaters and shirts into the bags, glancing at Tommy for confirmation every so moment. He has only owned a pair of black shorts and a white shirt, accompanied by a dark-colored blazer. They'd also have a set of pajamas, and grey pants for the colder evenings.

The siblings then go and buy shoes. "Pick anything you want, Tommy," Dream says kindly. "I'll be back soon." It's natural; communication. During their missions, communication was survival.

Tommy exhales and awkwardly shuffles by the rows of shoes to find a pair that he likes. He is used to the black tennis shoes he owns now, but a change would be nice.

(For a moment, he thinks of what shoes will help him run the fastest and will help him move around stealthily during missions. But he isn't there anymore, he has to remind himself.

He has escaped. He is free.

It doesn't feel that way, though.)

Dream returns, frowning when he notices Tommy hasn't selected a pair. "I'll help," he offers. "You should be a size thirteen."

Tommy finds a white pair of shoes with red stripes across the edges. He likes them. When he shows Dream, he grins. They pay and leave the store with a pile of bags that the older has offered to carry since Tommy's arms are still bandaged from the aftermath of their escape.

They find themselves strolling by town, tall shops, and orange trees bringing newness to their lives. A reminder of what it is now, and what will be their future. Well, until they are found and must hide again.

"You can find a job," Dream offers after a comfortable silence has passed. "Only if you want to."

Tommy's time will be spent in his apartment, staring at the walls. So, he nods his head, because anything is better than spending hours in space, he cannot call home just yet.

"What will happen?" Tommy says.

"What?" Dream glances at him.

He repeats his words. "What will happen after we are safe?" Because they are not safe yet. But there will be a time that comes when they will be.

"We will live," Dream declares. Simple words: but Tommy realizes they won't have to be reluctant when leaving the apartment, or hesitation when they must leave each other for a couple of hours. Tommy realizes they won't have to survive anymore. They will be able to live.

The brothers end up at a park, surrounded by tough trees and a playground nearby with screaming children. They sit on a red bench, and Dream drops the bags by their feet.

The older boy nods towards the direction of the playground. "Go play."

Tommy scowls. "I'm not a child, Dream." He hasn't been one since the age of ten.

"I'll push you on the swings," Dream chuckles again, earning a light punch by the younger. "I'm joking, I'm joking!"

Tommy sighs, and he finds himself relaxing. The Academy would be displeased. He'd be punished for being so light-minded around so many people, in public. They are taught to hold stoic faces and

ignore vulnerability.

“Breathe,” Dream says, next to him. Tommy must be shaking, then. Thinking about his past does that to him. “Breathe, Tommy. You don’t have to think about that place anymore.”

But he does. Because familiar faces still haunt him, and the burns of skin will always be a painful reminder of his past. The nights starving, the brothers he left behind, the lessons that will be forever engraved in his soul.

“See those kids over there?” Dream’s words are like arms that grab him from the water. It was him who pulled Tommy out of the water.

(“You’re an idiot! You could have killed yourself!” Dream shouts at him the day afterward. “What have I told you, Theseus?”

“Five minutes. To count in my head.”

Dream sighs. “Promise me, you won’t do it again.” Theseus stares at the new marks on his brother’s skin, a result of tampering with Theseus’ progress during the lesson. The Teachers would have shouted at the older boy, he was likely reprimanded by the Headmaster for pulling such a stunt. “Promise me, Theseus.”

If it had been any other person, who’d assisted a student, they could have been killed. But Dream is Dream. He is an exception.

“I promise,” Theseus eventually says.)

“Yeah,” Tommy blinks, glancing at the group of boys who run around the field in front of them. They’re in the middle of a game of soccer and look around Tommy’s age.

“Join them,” Dream offers. “I won’t go anywhere.”

“Dream,” Tommy groans. “Please, don’t make me.”

He nudges the boy. “C’mon. I don’t have all day.”

Tommy groans again and stands up. He crosses his hands against his chest and glares at his brother. “I hate you.”

“I know you do. Give me your knife.” The one strapped to his ankle. “You wouldn’t want to stab yourself when you run.”

Tommy hands the knife to Dream and sighs.

“Go easy on them, Tommy,” Because they both know Tommy is faster and can outrun most kids his age. Some lessons, they’d make them run until they collapsed. But this is not a lesson, this is a game.

“I hate you,” Tommy reminds his brother – so he doesn’t forget. He turns around and slowly jogs to one of the boys who stands to the side. For a moment, he wants to turn around and stay within the comforting presence of Dream, but he’s too far in and the short boy notices him approaching.

“Hey,” Tommy says uneasily. “Can I join?”

“Yeah, sure!” The boy is even shorter up close. His hair is the shade of Tommy’s before it was dyed. “I’m Tubbo, are you new around here?”

Tommy nods his head stiffly.

“Makes sense,” Tubbo nods his head, and Tommy wants to know how he knows this fact. But he concludes the town is tight-nit, and Tubbo would have seen him around

“You can be on my team,” Tubbo says, after tying his shoelaces. He stands up and beckons Tommy to follow. He is briefly introduced to everyone, but Tubbo reassures him not to remember their names.

Tommy remembers every name. He is a former member of The Academy, after all.

The blond-haired boy soon finds out that the game isn't as strict, and rule-ridden as he used to play. They mess around and shove each other over when someone gets a goal. Tubbo stays by him for a bit, laughing around and shouting. Tommy doesn't know how to feel natural, feeling on edge throughout the game. He can't concentrate, and his mind spins.

The ball then lands by his feet. “Tommy, over here!” Tubbo is across him, a few yards away, his arms waving in the air. A boy, his name is Fundy, charges towards Tommy to capture the ball off him.

Tommy takes a deep breath in and rushes forward. He dribbles the ball between his feet and outruns the ginger-haired boy who runs after him. Tommy then slows down, kicking the ball to Tubbo who sprints forward, dogging a taller boy. Tubbo kicks the ball back to Tommy, as they edge near the goal. Tommy doesn't have to think twice about kicking to the left of the keeper. He can see how the goalie – Purpled (It's a weird name, but he grew up with a boy named *Sapnap*, so it's nothing he's not used to) is edging towards the left, thinking he can read Tommy's movements well. He can't because the boy hides it well as he kicks.

He scores a goal. Tommy can hear Tubbo shout in the background, and a couple of guys rush to Tommy. He doesn't grin, but he feels lighter.

(He's still ready to push someone to the ground and attack someone who threatens.)

The game progresses not long after high fives and cheers of congratulations. Tommy finds himself in the background, not wanting to draw much attention to himself again. The game proceeds for twenty or so minutes, Tommy definitely does not find the seconds pass by in his head. As some of the boys start heading home, he turns to leave too, once he realizes Dream probably does not want to wait too long.

He knows Dream, doesn't mind, though.

“You're leaving!?” A voice calls after Tommy as he leaves the field. Tommy tenses for a second and turns to find Tubbo jogging after him.

“Um, yeah,” Tommy nods his head once Tubbo stands in front of him, once again. He nods his head at Dream who is watching them carefully with an indecipherable look in his eyes.

“You should join us another time,” Tubbo grins, combing his brown hair out of his eyes. “You're cool, Tommy.”

“Thanks,” Tommy mutters, remembering what closeness meant. (Closeness was a connection. And connection meant death.

Dream was always an exception.)

“I’ll see you around, then,” Tubbo eventually says when Tommy doesn’t say anything else. “Bye!”

Tommy nods his head and turns around to meet Dream. For some reason, his brother is smiling.

“Are we going?” Tommy questions uncertainly.

“Oh – yeah,” He picks up the bags. “Did you have fun?”

Tommy doesn’t say anything, glancing away. He doesn’t like that he’s been the most vulnerable he has been in years. He doesn’t like how he’s changing so much.

They stop at a bakery near their apartment. Dream buys Tommy a chocolate bun and cream cheese bagel for himself. They enjoy their meal, as they return back, starting a short conversation.

Tommy doesn’t know he’ll get used to this. But Dream will help him, and together, they will.

His name is Dream and he escaped The Academy.

The wind ruffles his brown hair, and his tired eyes meet the sky.

Dream, a voice echoes in his dreams. *When we leave, watch the stars with me.*

One day, he will whisper the name that burns his frosted lips, back to him. But now, he can’t. Because his two best friends are still trapped, and the man will not stop until they are all free.

Dream watches his younger brother in the distance. A part of him is still a student at The Academy; watchful eyes calculating the distant figures and the potential harm that can be inflicted to his brother. He’ll devise a plan in seconds and execute it in a matter of moments.

But the other part of himself, the softer, more calm side, watches him with fondness and he is relieved because Tommy finally has a chance to be a kid. He won’t be able to go to school, nor will be able to attain the experiences that others will, and he will be forever burdened by moments of his past that no person should go through – but right now, him running through a field, careless and carefree, is enough.

One day he hopes that they all can enjoy a moment like this together. Of lightness, of no worry. He hopes for someday, his hand will be with his other, and his smile will match another. The four of them, against the world.

The wind picks up, and the orange and red leaves fly past him. Dream’s eyes dip closed, the sound of laughter sudden music to his ears.

Dream exhales.

Lessons

Chapter Summary

Later that evening, both brothers lay down on their small couch as they watch a random program on the TV that Dream has just installed. Tommy had not helped, only laughing at his older brother's struggle.

"She had told me she trusted me, so easily," Tommy's eyes flicker to Dream's, whose eyes are on him in thought. "I don't get it; she doesn't even know me yet."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He gets a nose piercing.

Dream doesn't like it.

"It makes you look older," Dream grips his chin and turns his face ten different angles before Tommy shoves away his steady arms. "You look like you'd sell weed."

"And what's wrong with that, bitch?" Tommy rolls his eyes, kicking Dream's foot. Dream grins and rolls his sleeves up. The boys fall to the floor in a tackle. Dream wins. He pins Tommy down in a matter of seconds but makes sure not to hurt his injured arm. Tommy can practically hear his smile.

"Stop slacking," Dream commands, but there is softness in his voice. "You're better than this."

Tommy remembers Dream's tough stares and harsher conditions back at The Academy. He led a couple of classes. Under the eye of the other Teachers, they were strangers. When they were accompanied by George and Sapnap, or alone, they were brothers.

"I have an injured arm," Tommy complains. "I'd beat you otherwise."

"It's getting better," Dream notes as he pulls the younger boy up. "We can start to spar properly in a week or so."

Tommy nods his head. He can't get out of shape, and they must prepare for the worst. Besides, it would be a shame to avoid a lesson from The Academy's best-graduated student. Dream was always the best. Then George, and then Sapnap.

Tommy would have been the fourth. Dream always saw potential in him, and the other older boys told him he was miles above the rest in his class.

"What do you want to do today?" Dream questions Tommy over breakfast. Two slices of toast, and a boiled egg under the soft colors of the sunset. They wake up at six because it was how they were taught.

"The bakery," Tommy thinks out loud. "I think I'll ask to work there."

“You do know you won’t be able to eat on the job.”

“Shut up, Dream.” Both of them know Tommy has never had an appetite, other than for sweets. He can eat three chocolate croissants, a blueberry muffin, and a bar of caramel chocolate in one sitting but will struggle to finish a plate of rice for lunch.

“Will you be okay, alone?” Dream has been looking for a job for the last week and has fortunately found one under a name, Quackity. Tommy doesn’t know the details yet, he hasn’t asked.

“Yes,” because Tommy was alone for years of his life. He didn’t always have Dream. He didn’t always have Sapnap and George.

The older is hesitant, but he shouldn’t be, because he knows that Tommy can hold himself. He learned how to use a knife in combat years ago, and always carries a gun on himself.

(There’s one under both their cushions as they prepare for the inevitable.)

“Be safe,” Dream makes him promise.

“I will.” He does.

Dream survives because he is quick and calculated. He is honored because plans are devised in his mind in seconds. He executes them perfectly. He is considered the best.

George survives because he is intelligent. He can learn languages faster than his other siblings, and his mind is deemed a wonder. He learns that his difficulty in areas of fighting and weapon use can be redeemed through Mathematics, Arabic, French, and Mandarin. He stores information in his mind, and he stays quiet and disciplined because he can control himself. He must, to persist.

Sapnap lives off anger and fury, but he survives because he is the only one that can match The Academy’s best student. His knives are like fingers, and his gun work receives praise from the Teachers and Headmaster. But he’s hot-headed and disciplined until he’s put in his place. The fire inside of him is dimmed after countless punishments, and he learns to manage the raging fire within his spirit.

There are Graduates after them, but they do not fit under the expectations of the Headmaster. His heart is of stone, and he expects a fourth; a student who can fulfill the footsteps of the three.

Then, comes Theseus. Dream is the first to notice him.

“Him, he’ll be our fourth.”

It’s usually Sapnap who points out a kid who slightly excels above the rest of the students. One time, his name is Gray, and he can take down half his class with a knife before he is stopped. But Sapnap is wrong when the boy does not return another morning.

George had picked last time, selecting a taller boy with sharp eyes and an intense face. He was taken away and did not return.

After their failed selections, they stop their game.

But then Dream chooses a boy with fiery eyes like Sapnap and a face similar to George's. This is Dream's first time choosing and his last. He sharpens his knife while Sapnap and George stare uninterestedly at the class in front of them.

The class is introduced to knives. A brown-haired boy, tall, not seeming any different from the rest, grips the weapon carefully in his hand while his surrounding siblings test the weapon by swinging it around.

Sapnap and George stare at Dream oddly. "What?" They say when they register his words.

Dream nods his head at the boy. He is number sixteen. Later, they find his name: Theseus.

The three men watch as each boy lines up. The Teacher tells them to throw the knife. When it comes to Theseus' turn, he misses the bullseye by a couple of inches.

Sapnap laughs lightly. Not at the boy, but Dream's assumption. "Are you sure?"

Dream's eyes are calculating, as he observes the student with a small frown. He crosses his arms over his chest and stands strong. "He'll learn. He'll become better."

"Okay then," George shrugs calmly as they leave the room once they are called to assist with another class. "And if you're wrong?"

Dream is not wrong. He never is.

Because unlike anyone else, Dream can see the flame in Theseus' eyes, that shines with such determination to continue. He may not be the most skilled and smart, nor is he disciplined yet, but he has the most courage to continue. He has the most will, persistence, and stubbornness.

Theseus will survive.

The bakery's front is lit up with welcoming lights decorated around the purple flowers that are bedded in front of the large windows. 'Niki's Bakery' are the words displayed on the sign, with pink, curly letters. Two wooden tables are stood by the front, under a light shade.

Tommy watches carefully from across the street. To anyone walking by, he is a phone-addicted teenager who is ditching school. But he's surveying the store itself, watching customers come and go before he will cross the road and walk inside.

The boy remembers the taste of the sweetness of the chocolate bun, and wonders if Dream will be mad if Tommy buys himself a treat instead of lunch, which the crumpled ten-dollar note in his

pocket is for. Tommy used to trade his sour buns with George's vanilla puddings. When Dream found out, he was not pleased.

Something about a healthy diet, Dream had said. If he wanted to outperform others he had to eat properly, apparently.

Tommy finds himself in front of the store in between thoughts. He pushes the door open, and the bell chimes. The walls are decorated with paintings of sunsets and flowers, hiding the soft tone of wallpaper that Tommy doesn't like. Rows of baked bread and cakes are displayed behind glass and the scent of coffee drifts.

"I'm Niki, how can I help you?" Tommy remembers her from yesterday.

"I was looking for a job," Tommy darts his eyes around. "Are you hiring?"

Niki hesitates before her eyes light up. "You came in yesterday, with your brother, didn't you?" Tommy does not appreciate how they are so recognizable. But he nods his head anyway. "Did you enjoy the treats?"

"They were good," Tommy nods his head. "My brother said he wanted to come around again." Dream had not said so, but Tommy assumed that the lie would help him a little more.

"I'm glad," Niki smiles, surveying the boy. She likely wonders why he is not at school. "Well, I'm usually the only one here, but I have been in need of a helping hand recently."

Niki asks him for his name and basic details. His name is Tommy, and he is sixteen, words he recites from his mind which Dream had made him learn.

(The hail knocks on the roof of their car, and the radio is light, it can barely be heard.

Dream speaks. "Your name is Tommy, and you are sixteen. You moved from the country with me, after we sold our farm. You finished high school early. You have lived with me for the last four years."

Theseus recites his words. Dream does not expect him to repeat the words until his mouth is dry, as The Academy would have done. Because his brother knows he needs to speak the words once, to recall.

"My name is Tommy, and I am sixteen. We moved from the country after we sold the farm. I finished high school early and have lived with my brother for the last four years."

Theseus - now, Tommy - exhales. Dream smiles.)

Niki thanks him after the information is given. "Let's go to the back, I'll close up early so I can show you the basics." Although Tommy is wary, because he will be alone in a room without a straight exit, he is trained and can hold himself.

Niki then asks for his phone number, and his guardian's, in case she needs him to take an extra shift or in case of an emergency.

"I don't have a phone,"

Niki quickly frowns but covers it up with a hesitant smile. "That's okay. What's your brother's?"

Tommy tells her, and Niki shows him around the lounge. There is a small couch, and a table, and a

fridge with soft drinks, for breaks.

“I thought you worked alone?” Tommy eyes the stack of drinks and snacks around. The place looks messy, and since Tommy is observative, he notices that it seems someone else has been here.

“My friends come around sometimes. Don’t worry, they won’t disturb you too much.”

Tommy is a fast learner and picks up things fairly quickly. He knows how to use the machines and memorizes the steps to make a few of the drinks. Give him a moment alone, and he will memorize the whole list.

“I’ll be here during your first couple of shifts, to help out. If I’m not here, ask one of my friends.” Tommy assumes they are around regularly. “You look like a good kid Tommy, don’t let me down.”

“I won’t.” Tommy nods his head.

“You know, I should ask why you’re not at school,” Niki laughs lightly, as Tommy practices making a cappuccino for her. She sits on one of the wooden tables, a cloth in her hand as she leans back to observe Tommy’s skills. She is impressed, sharing the same look as Tommy’s Teachers used to have when he came back from missions successful or held his own against some of the Graduates. “But I trust you, Tommy. I really do.”

Later that evening, both brothers lay down on their small couch as they watch a random program on the TV that Dream has just installed. Tommy had not helped, only laughing at his older brother’s struggle.

“She had told me she trusted me, so easily,” Tommy’s eyes flicker to Dream’s, whose eyes are on him in thought. “I don’t get it; she doesn’t even know me yet.” They lay on opposite sides of the couch, Tommy’s legs dangle in his older brother’s lap, while his arms are sprawled behind a cushion. They aren’t listening to the program that runs, but it helps fill the void of silence that both despise.

“People are like that,” Dream says after careful concentration. “They will trust easily because they don’t have a reason not to.”

“I could have robbed her or threatened her at knifepoint.” Tommy stretches his arms to pick up the weapon that is hidden under the couch. There’s a gun in the fruit bowl and a pocketknife hidden somewhere in their fridge. Tommy doesn’t know why they do it, maybe out of intuition.

“You’re a child, you’re not expected to rob her,” Dream explains to the younger boy, but he does not tease Tommy for not understanding, because he recognizes that Tommy has never been exposed as he has. Dream has been on many more missions in public, the most for a month, where he owned a house himself to discover the location of an organization The Academy wanted him to research.

Dream has talked to people and learned to understand his surroundings. Whereas Tommy is somewhat newer to this, as he was restricted between the walls of The Academy for the majority of his life.

(One of the many reasons, Dream hates their past. Because Tommy never got to live life as a normal kid.)

“But I could have,” Tommy plays with the knife in his hand, until Dream swats his legs.

“Stop doing that.”

“Or what?” The younger boy grins, aiming the knife at his brother’s head.

“Tommy,” Dream warns.

“Dream,” Tommy mocks but he puts the knife down. He pulls his legs up and turns his body, so he lays on Dream’s side. Dream scoffs, but he ends up wrapping around him, as he put on a movie. Tommy would not be caught dead ever being so close to another being, while Dream would never show this side to anyone else.

Tommy’s eyes flicker to Dream’s green. He can recall the same soft eyes echoing back icy and cold. The Academy made him cold and strict. Dream would yell at the students if they slacked or did not pay attention. They were disciplined by their Teachers and older siblings – the Graduates.

Tommy would hate his Lessons with Dream, Sappap, and George. Like a lesson, he was taught to appreciate them, because the Teacher’s hits were harder, and their punishments were crueler.

(Over time, Tommy enjoyed the times Dream would come in for lessons, appreciating the validation and the appearance of the man when he was proud. Not that Tommy would admit it out loud, ever.)

“We’ll watch ‘Die Hard,’” Dream suggests, but because he holds the remote, it’s an order.

“Number two, though. *Live Free or Die Hard* because it’s just better.”

“Sure,” Tommy doesn’t care. Occasionally, Dream interrupts with an explanation, and Tommy butts in with unneeded comments. Then Dream tells him to be quiet, and Tommy retaliates by threatening him with a knife.

The night is warm and both brothers bicker under the watchful eyes of the moon. They fall asleep by the credits close, and maybe, for the first time in their lives, they are asleep with smiles.

Dream always follows the Lessons of his Teachers. When he meets Theseus, it changes.

He knows connection means death. He knows that his friendship with George and Sappap is already thin ice. At The Academy, you don’t have friends – you have siblings. But those siblings are ripped away from you, and never seen again if they cannot hold against their own.

It is impossible to love, they are taught, if you could not love yourself. They were monsters, the worst of the worst. They are taught to hate their skin and every part of themselves.

The first time Dream meets Theseus; is the first time he regards his Teachers wrong.

“He’s just another kid,” Sapnap tells him. “Why is he so special?”

Dream cannot answer him. Nor can he answer his Headmaster, when he is asked which kid, he had an eye on. Which of them stood out.

Dream lies. “Number Thirty,” because he is not allowed to use their names.

Afterward, Number Thirty is treated with harsher conditions and ruthless punishments. Number Thirty did not return one evening. Dream does not flinch, nor does his heart burn with guilt. Because he is strong, he is a monster.

Theseus teaches Dream, that not all of them are monsters. Theseus has big dreams and lights his passions with fire. He trains harder than most of his siblings, he has the most stubborn to live. As their years went on, Theseus changes. His face grows to stone, Theseus no longer smiles.

Dream then promises an escape. To get them out of there.

Once, Theseus agrees with his plan. Once, he’d share Dream’s plan to leave and never come back. But Theseus changes, and he no longer holds the same obstinacy he once did. Theseus grows tired. He grows exhausted.

Dream goes to his friends one night, with a final mission. “We’re escaping. Before Theseus’ Graduation. We are leaving.”

Sapnap is on board. George, not so much.

“It’s dangerous, you know that Dream. They won’t kill you, but they’ll kill us if we’re caught.”

“Theseus has to leave,” Dream says, and has not realized until then how his connection to the younger boy grew strong. Because Theseus isn’t some random kid. Theseus is his brother.

The Academy did not allow connections. Dream did not care.

“Little brother,” Dream had once said to the boy, who slapped his arm and shouted at him to be quiet before a Teacher heard them.

“He will die,” Dream mutters quietly to his friends. Theseus had to survive. “Their last Lesson is the hardest. Barely anyone comes back from it.”

“We did,” George reasons. “You know he can. He’s our fourth.”

“You need to understand,” Because they didn’t. “We have to go.”

Sapnap and George had listened because Dream directed their plans most of the time. They listened when Dream had said Theseus would be the best, and they listen now. Because as much as they hate to admit it, they care about Theseus too. Behind George’s blank eyes and Sapnap’s attitude which forces anyone away, they care about the kid.

Care is connection. Connection is death.

Dream had not understood the significance of the lesson. Not when Ryder, a kind boy who always

told stories at night, had not returned from a mission. Even when Arlo, a Graduated who had become Dream's mentor, was killed.

He understood it when he and Tommy left, and George and Sapnap were left behind. He understood the pain and suffering that came with it when he was separated from his best friends, expecting to never see them again.

He understands it then, and he understands it again.

Dream follows the Lesson of his Teachers. Connection is death, and Dream has a connection to Tommy, George, and Sapnap. They are his brothers – his family.

Dream survives, but he will die for his family.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for reading!!

i enjoyed reading the comments in the last chapter. and ty for all the kudos!!

next update should be by tuesday

(unedited :p)

Human

Chapter Summary

Tommy fears drowning. He fears death and losing the people he loves.

He is weak. And now, he drowns in the previous faces of his siblings, and can still feel the harsh reprimands of his skin, in consequence.

“Breathe,” Tommy makes out the familiar voice. “Breathe, Theseus.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy wakes up from another nightmare.

His heart races and he cannot breathe. Strong fingers grip his hands, but he can't *feel* either.

Tommy can hear a soft voice between the madness. His chest heaves, and he gasps for breaths, spluttering in disorientation. The Academy made Tommy strong, yet Tommy still feels weak. He feels powerless, like a pawn. Tommy will forever have hidden fears, even though The Academy drove all emotion out of their students.

Tommy fears drowning. He fears death and losing the people he loves.

He is weak. And now, he drowns in the previous faces of his siblings, and can still feel the harsh reprimands of his skin, in consequence.

“Breathe,” Tommy makes out the familiar voice. “*Breathe*, Theseus.”

“Dre-am-?” And his voice cracks, but he can't help it because he can't feel his thoughts or control his heart.

“Yeah, it's me. You'll be okay, just breathe with me.”

He does because it's Dream.

Tommy is meant to be their fourth. He is meant to be strong, but he crumbles in fear of his memories and his darkest secrets. He still trusts people, and cares, and *loves*. He isn't what The Academy raised. Sappnap was forever wrong, he isn't miles above the rest of his ex-siblings.

“I'm sorry,” Tommy apologizes, again and again. “I'm *sorry*, Dream. I'm sorry –”

“Kid, stop apologizing,” Dream holds his shoulders, secured. “I want you to breathe. C'mon.”

Tommy passes out.

He wakes up again, his throat dry and his head dizzy. When he adjusts to the light above his eyes and his surroundings, he notices the glass of water and pill on the wooden table in front of him.

He does not freak out at the new setting, because Dream speaks from behind him (and because he's

trained to custom easily to new experiences). He stands in the kitchen, but Tommy's back is to him, so he only hears his voice.

"The medicine will help with your headache. Don't swallow it dry." Tommy does anyway, rubbing his eyes, his breaths light. He wants to know why he is in the living room because he remembers passing out on his bed after a shift at Niki's. He's been working there for a week or so, and he's found it manageable so far.

Dream comes around the couch and sits next to him. "You good now, kid?"

"I don't remember," He doesn't really, rubbing his face. "Did I have a nightmare or something?"

Dream is silent for a moment. "Yeah," his voice is very quiet. "You had a, um, panic attack. But you passed out after, and I took you here so I could keep an eye on you. In case you woke up again."

Tommy's cheeks heat. He doesn't like showing weakness – he was taught against it. Especially to his older brother. He's embarrassed.

"You didn't have to do that," Tommy mutters, ducking his head to stare at the weirdly shaped stain on the carpet. "And I'm not a child."

"I never you said you were," Dream says, before laughing lightly under his breath. "But you are."

Tommy's too tired to punch him in retaliation. All he can think of is the haunting faces of his past. Because in the midst of the siblings, are Sapnap and George who are still stuck there. And although they make up two-thirds of the top Graduates, The Academy has always valued Dream's life the most.

"It'll be okay," Dream reassures him, rubbing his back carefully. "I promise, Tommy."

"Don't fucking make promises you can't keep," Tommy snaps, regretfully. "You can't promise a thing, Dream."

Dream leans back in his seat, calm and collected, unlike Tommy's sudden heat. He is similar to Sapnap in that sense. The older boy used to deny being alike to Tommy in any shape or form.

"When am I ever wrong?" Dream says back. Because he's kept every promise he has made, and his words will never and have never had a trace of doubt.

Tommy is ready to snap back, but he pauses when he cannot think of anything. "You said we'd leave. All of us. You promised we would all be safe, but Sapnap and George are still stuck at The Academy."

"They told me they didn't want to come."

And the words hit him.

"What?" Tommy's eyes furrow and his heart skips a beat, as he grasps Dream's words. "What the fuck did you just say?"

"They didn't want to come," Dream replies plainly, tension drifting between them. "George helped me make the plan, it was always going to be you and me. Sapnap agreed."

Tommy remembers leaving the agency. He remembers the despair he had felt when George and

Sapnap could not be found. He remembers almost ruining the plan of escape. He remembers feeling so fucking empty in the car, as they left his life. He remembers not being able to speak for days, as Dream and he had hidden, and waited.

Tommy remembers feeling like he was on a mission. He was a student of The Academy, and his mission was to escape. He was Theseus. He is Tommy now.

“And you fucking let them?” Tommy exclaims, not able to believe what Dream says to him. “You let them say no. You let them stay behind?!”

Tommy almost forgets Dream is the best. Dream does not care because care is connection which is why he survives.

“Tommy,” Dream is still calm and soft-spoken as if he’s talking to a zoo animal who has left its enclosure. “I didn’t have a choice; I couldn’t force them to do anything.”

“You’re *Dream*,” Tommy shouts. “Why didn’t you tell me? I could have – I could have talked them out of staying. I could have done something.”

“No, you couldn’t have. They were adamant about staying.”

Tommy scoffs and is ready to storm out of the room. He stays for his dignity and because he doesn’t want to see immature and childish. Those were the words The Academy used to get under his bones, to finally discipline him. He can act out now because Dream won’t hit him like they would make him before. But Dream didn’t have a choice, none of them did.

“Then we should have stayed,” Tommy says strictly. “We should have stayed.”

“No, we shouldn’t have.” Now Dream stands up and strides up to the boy, who is only about an inch shorter than him. A couple of years ago, Dream would almost have to kneel lower to speak to him. But now Tommy only must tilt his head slightly, for their eyes to lock.

Brilliant blue eyes meet forest green.

“Dream –”

“No Tommy,” The man interrupts him with a frown. “It was my choice to leave, and it was the best choice. Sapnap and George will leave soon, we’ll figure out a way to get them out there as well as everyone else. But I don’t regret for a second, taking you with me.”

“Why?” Tommy says gruffly, looking away. Dream grips his chin and forces him to look back at him. He had used the same gesture when they were younger when Dream forced Tommy to listen to him and make sure he did not forget.

“Because,” Dream says slowly. “Because I couldn’t bear seeing you hurt anymore.”

The words hit him again, and Tommy doesn’t know what to think nor say. “I’m not weak –”

“And I know that. But you were only a month from the last Lesson. Barely any students make it out alive.”

Tommy had been training for it, for months in preparation. He listened harder in classes and stopped eating for a period of time, to test his stomach. The final Lesson was their last test of endurance. The last exam before Graduation. It was gruelling standards, Tommy would only hear Sapnap and George tell stories about it, never would he have to endure it.

Because of his older brother.

“You didn’t think I could make it out alive.” Tommy accuses.

“I didn’t want you to go through it.” Dream exhales, seeming finished with the conversation.

“Tommy, are you listening to me?”

“What if I’m not?” The boy snaps, because he’s angry and can’t handle the niceness that radiates off the man by him. “Will you hit me? Will you lock me in my room? What will you do, Dream?”

“No,” he replies softly. “I won’t.”

“I was prepared. I was ready, I was meant to be your fourth. But you guys never really saw me as one of you guys, right? I was always lesser, childish.” The words of his Teachers echo through his mind. Their words inked through his mind, and he realized how much the feeling of failure hurt. The Academy used their worst fears against them, to shape them into the version they wanted. Young ten-year-old would appear with their eyes bright and dazed, to only turn stone-cold and depressed as the years went on.

“That isn’t true,” Dream denies.

“Then we could have left after Graduation. After I finished the final mission.” But Dream doesn’t think he’s good enough, which is why Dream made sure they left. Tommy is angry, although the anger should have been driven out of him. They would use his rage, and it should have disappeared to a clear feeling of nothingness. Because assassins don’t feel – assassins cannot let emotions control them.

Sapnap became controlled. So had Tommy.

But he’s angry now. Angry that Dream left, and left his best friends – family – behind because he believed that Tommy could not make the final mission. They could have left months afterwards, together. If Dream had trusted him to survive.

Tommy shoves Dream’s off him and leaves the room. He can hear Dream’s shouts as he exits the apartment. He pretends he does not care about the hurt that momentarily flashes on Dream’s face, to only disappear a second later. Tommy does not care. He will not feel.

Tommy is trained to be an assassin. He was for six years. He will prove Dream wrong. That he is strong enough to be his fourth.

Sapnap speaks of a story. He is the youngest between him, Dream and George. His story is the latest, and he can remember his the best.

“Our class began at a desert, blinded and cuffed to each other.” Egypt, he tells quietly – unlike him. The Sahara. Where day was night, and the sun burned their skin. “No water or food. It was day

three when we first ate. I remember – camel meat and milk. It felt like the best meal I'd ever had.”

Sapnap tells how the assassins would eventually split up, as they would be shot if found in groups. They work separately, as they grew up in The Academy and this is how they are taught. Sapnap speaks of finding a village and with the only gun strapped to his belt, he shoots a man and his family in his home, to raid their drawers and kitchen. He finds food that lasts a couple of days.

Their final lesson is the hardest. It will last from a couple of weeks to months. George recalls their anticipation as they waited for Sapnap, and how there was never a true time to tell when the students would return. George had only graduated a year before, Dream the year previous. They stay up, with memories of the fateful final exam, and can only hold hope that Sapnap returns every night.

Sapnap does. They are the first two notified of his finish, and they meet him in a helicopter with a couple of The Academy's medics. Sapnap is in slightly worse state than the two others had been previously with more burns, cuts and bruises. He grips onto the right side of his stomach, where he had ripped off a piece of fabric to stop a large cut from bleeding through. He can barely open his eyes.

However, he is more tanned, and Dream notices a difference in him. He is injured and will need bed rest for weeks, but he will come back stronger than before.

Sapnap graduates, the top of his class. Months pass and other students return slowly. Sapnap becomes their third, and Dream stops needing to look out for him so much. Not since Sapnap has proved himself and his friends.

Sapnap has survived.

A year passes. Then two. For once, Dream feels complete. Because he survives, and so does his friends. But then he is told that the headmaster is looking for a fourth. He hopes to complete his set of perfect students. They are referred to the Elites by a few; the ones who have set the standard for the rest of the students. But years pass, and no students can match up to the expectations of the higher boys.

Then Dream, Sapnap and George meet Theseus and they decide he's their fourth. Because he's smart and calculating and can hold his own. Sapnap watches him carefully between classes, and George keeps an eye on him during mealtimes, as he sits alone, sometimes with silent classmates.

Dream is the first to speak to him.

“I'm Dream,” He is not soft, nor does he smile.

“Sixteen,” The boy clears his throat, glancing around the room uncertainly.

“Well, what's your name?” Dream knows the answer, but he asks because he can.

The boy hesitates because they do not use their names in The Academy. But he must not refuse to answer a question of a Graduate. "Theseus."

Dream likes his confidence. Although he can work on it a bit. "Chin up. Speak clearer." He almost smirks. "Theseus."

Theseus does not frown or scowl. Maybe, in another life, he would have.

He does seem startled though. Because no one refers to the younger students as their names – they have their numbers for a reason, the ones tattooed on their skin. Wrist and stomach. "Yes, sir."

After Dream speaks to Theseus for the first time, he tells George and Sapnap to keep an eye on him. They update him every few so days. He's improving in his classes, George says while Sapnap tells Dream that the boy can last the longest underwater compared to his classmates.

Good, Dream thinks. Any advantage will assist him to survive.

He shouldn't become so attached. He should not care. He is Dream, and he is cunning and uncaring. He has killed children, babies, mothers and fathers. He has stabbed his classmates and stolen food from some, to survive. But there is something about the brown-haired boy with blue eyes that ruins every teaching and every lesson he is taught. And he hates it.

Dream should not hesitate when he must use Theseus as a demonstration for a class, punching him in the jaw. But he does.

Dream should not talk to the boy in between him in classes. Tell him tips and teaches him to improve. But he does.

Dream should not grow close to the boy. But eventually, he does.

And Dream should not save him from the swallowing waters, as the boy is seconds away from drowning under the time underwater. He is the strong arms that grip the boy to pull him upwards. He is scolded and punished. But Dream will save him in the same situation, in every life, and he will not regret it.

"You care about the kid," Sapnap announces. "You didn't have a weakness, Dream. Everyone has a weakness. And now you're like everyone else."

Maybe he is like everyone else. Because for years, he is forced into a position and title, which he has never been able to control. But Dream is *human*. He feels and cares for a boy who has taught him that he is not just a cold assassin.

He hides and denies his true thoughts because it is how he is taught. Their life lives on lessons. "No," he lies. Dream is a good liar, but Sapnap knows that he is. He denies it because no one must know. No one must know that under his mask, he has a weakness. And one day, he will learn to love again.

To anyone else, he is Dream. He is cold, heartless and ready to kill.

But Dream is also human.

thank you for all the kudos and comments! i appreciate them so so much and would love to hear what u guys think so far :))
next chapter will focus on tommy + dream again and we'll be introduced to new characters.

also i got acrylic nails and they're wayy too long so it's super hard to type as efficiently, but next chapter should hopefully be up around Monday!

Revenge

Chapter Summary

“What’s on your mind?” Niki asks, still watching the boy as he wipes the counter.

Murder, Tommy thinks but he cannot say so aloud. He doesn’t want to be fired. So instead, he says, “Nothing really. I’m just tired.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

During their missions, Dream wears a mask. It is white and has two holes poked for his eyes.

Tommy does not recognize him when it is on. He is no longer Dream; he is an assassin, and he has a mission. He will not stop until it is completed.

“Ready?” Dream asks, his mask is pulled up, his dirty blonde locks of hair out of his face. Tommy will forever remember this first mission he witnesses with the older boy. He will not ever forget it.

“I’m ready,” Tommy replies.

Dream smiles. Maybe it’s the first time the younger boy has seen him do so, but he does not have time to think about it because the elder’s face is covered quickly, and he slips into a new body. He raises his gun from his belt, and his words are made of ice. Tommy follows behind him, but this is Dream’s mission, he is simply there for observation.

Dream does not hesitate when he kills.

“Tommy?” A light voice, laced in concern interrupts his thoughts. “You okay there, bud?”

Tommy glances up. He is shaking a chocolate milkshake for a waiting customer, and Niki has noticed his faraway expression. He regrets allowing so much emotion display on his face, even though it is not much.

“I’m okay,” he says, lowering the drink and taking out the whipped cream. Niki’s careful eyes rest on his movements, as he swiftly applies the topping and pushes a plastic lid onto the to-go cup. He slides it to the customer and hands them a straw.

Niki has been impressed by his ability to adjust so well. He’s memorized all the drink recipes and doesn’t need her assistance anymore. He can locate the baked goods and identify the contents of

each drawer with his eyes closed. What can he say – he's a quick learner.

"Have a great day," he says politely. The customer smiles back and leaves in a rush.

"What's on your mind?" Niki asks, still watching the boy as he wipes the counter.

Murder, Tommy thinks but he cannot say so aloud. He doesn't want to be fired. So instead, he says, "Nothing really. I'm just tired."

He isn't tired at all. He has no reason to be, not when his life used to be a repetitive cycle of waking up hungry, continuous lessons of training, classes, and the occasional mission, to only go to sleep starving. He is not tired, he tells himself. Because his life is much easier than it used to be.

(But there's a feeling inside of Tommy which he can't decipher. It makes him sad, drowsy, and exhausted. The feeling grows in his stomach and makes him want to lay in bed all day and hope to never wake up again. He ignores it though.)

"I can tell," Tommy's eyes snap to her, as she agrees with his lie. "Sit down, I'll make you a drink." Tommy is ready to interrupt her, to refuse, but Niki never takes no for an answer.

As Niki walks around to prepare a hot chocolate for the young boy, Tommy pulls off his apron and slumps on a barstool, leaning his chin on his palms as he watches Niki maneuver around, humming lightly under her breath. Making drinks is like a second nature to her, just how killing is to Tommy. It's natural, instinctual, and can be done with closed eyes.

"You look tired, kid. Are you getting much sleep?" Tommy would call her out for the names – 'kid' because it's only Dream and Sapnap who has ever referred to him as so, and he'd usually throw a jab back. But for some reason, he doesn't react to when Niki does.

"Yeah," he replies slowly, glancing around the store as his foot taps the metal leg of the seat. He goes to sleep around midnight, and his mind is programmed to wake up not a minute after six. Six hours of sleep is decent enough.

"That's good," Niki smiles. "I hope you're adjusting well. Have you talked to any other kids in the area?"

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. He doesn't have to lie, because he remembers talking to a brown-haired boy called Tubbo and his friends, not too long ago. "I have."

"For some reason," Niki laughs while she mixes the hot chocolate carefully. "I don't believe you."

She has a reason not to. Because Tommy has admitted before that he spends most of his time in his apartment, reading or watching TV with his older brother. Niki is always asking him questions, and he lets small statements slide, not knowing she would use them against him this way.

"I talk to a lot of people," Tommy attempts to reason with her.

"Your brother doesn't count," Niki rebuts. "And he's one person."

Tommy stays silent as she finishes making his drink. She places the mug gingerly in front of him and smiles. Tommy sighs, lifting the cup to his lips before she interrupts.

"Careful," she says. "It's hot."

It's not anything Tommy is not used to, and he takes three large swallows, setting the cup down to

see Niki rolling her eyes. Before she says anything, the door is shoved open, slamming against the wall as the bell lets out a loud jingle.

Tommy freezes and his hand reaches for his boot – where his knife is secured – but once seeing Niki’s nonchalant attitude, he reminds himself that he’s not on a mission and that he doesn’t have to be so on edge. It’s just a customer, who has made a rather dramatic entrance.

“Niki!” The voice exclaims, and Tommy realizes instantly that it’s not just an ordinary person. “I have one hell of a story to tell you,”

“Will,” Niki huffs, although her eyes shine fondness. “You’re going to break the door if you keep this up.”

“I’ve replaced it three months in a row, I wouldn’t mind keeping the streak up.” The man strides towards the counter, and Tommy finally turns his head to watch him. When was he was an assassin, his brain was wired to pinpoint a target’s weak points and strengths immediately. He forces himself to ignore his teachings, and rather stare curiously at his brown hair and thin glasses.

“Oh,” the man – Will, Niki has revealed his name to be – says quickly, finally noticing Tommy’s presence. “I didn’t know you were dealing with a customer.”

“I’m not a customer, bitch,” Tommy mutters under his breath. Will is startled by his abrupt attitude.

“He’s working here,” Niki explains quickly before her friend can get a word in. “Tommy, this is Wilbur. One of my friends.”

Tommy nods his head disinterestedly, taking a sip of his hot chocolate. It tastes good, even better when he reflects that it’s free.

“I didn’t know you were collecting children,” Wilbur teases. “If you needed that much help, you could have just asked me,”

Tommy snorts. “And you think you’d be any good?”

Wilbur is ready to shout back, but Niki laughs. “He isn’t wrong Will; you did break the coffee machine last time you touched it.”

“How the fuck did you manage to pull that one off, chief?” Tommy smirks.

“Listen here, you child–”

“Okay!” Niki says loudly. “Let’s not start anything, I don’t want to scare off any customers.”

“What customers?” Wilbur teases again, and Tommy immediately hates his smile. The man’s whole presence annoys him, and he wonders how someone like Niki can be friends like the prick. “If anything, Tommy started it.”

“I didn’t give you permission to use my name,” Tommy snaps back. “Bitch.”

“You’re twelve, you should not be swearing. Did your mother teach you manners?”

Tommy freezes but doesn’t let the comment get to him. “I’m sixteen, you old-ass man.”

“I’m twenty-five!”

“Old man,” Tommy repeats.

“Niki,” Wilbur complains. “Fire him.”

“No,” she laughs lightly. “He’s my favorite employee, Wilbur.” Tommy is her *only* employee, he would say but he doesn’t. “And he’ll be around for a while, so you guys have to get along.”

Tommy is not particularly fond of that idea. Wilbur is a bitch. He’s annoying and doesn’t want to be around him anymore. Luckily, Niki says that she has to talk to him in the back room, so he’s free from his presence for a while.

They leave the door open slightly, and Tommy hears hushed whispers from the other side. He has good hearing though and can hear every word out of their mouths. A skill he picked up over the years, one that all the assassins must have to be deemed useful and go on missions.

“He moved here recently, Will. He’s a good kid,”

“Doesn’t he have school? Do you even know anything about him?”

“Yeah, he moved with his older brother. And he finished school earlier. The point is that you should try and get to know him.”

“He’s a child, Niki.”

“Look, I didn’t say you had to be his friend. But if I’m out running errands, or busy, and you’re around, I want you to keep an eye on him. He’s reserved and I don’t think I’ve seen him smile until you’ve come around. Please? For me?”

Tommy scowls and drowns the rest of their conversation out. When they return back, Niki’s smile is wider, and Wilbur isn’t frowning anymore, as if he’s tolerating the young boy’s presence. Tommy didn’t join the bakery to befriend anyone. He’s here for the money, and to help Dream out so that he doesn’t have all the pressure on him to provide for them.

Tommy notices how he keeps thinking about Dream, and how his stomach turns when he does. Fights between them don’t ever last too long, but the process is excruciating as Tommy’s fear that Dream hates him. But at the same time, Tommy is still angry and frustrated.

“Tommy, you can head home early today. Rush is over, anyway.”

Tommy nods his head and moves to the backroom to retrieve his coat. When he returns, the two are still standing there, as if they are waiting for something.

“What do you want?” Tommy glares at Wilbur who is staring at him oddly. It’s like he’s trying to analyze the boy, but Tommy won’t allow it.

“Nothing,” Wilbur shrugs innocently, turning to Niki. “Do you want help with storage?”

“Yeah,” Before Tommy leaves, Niki keeps him behind for a second. “Stay safe, Tommy.”

Tommy is a former student of The Academy. He used to be an assassin. He will be safe.

“Okay,” he responds, before he leaves the bakery, the crisp Autumn air ruffling his blond hair, making him feel more numb than before.

Tommy remembers the first person he kills. He is Theseus and is only thirteen.

The man he kills is twenty-two. He dies alone in his apartment and won't be found until the next day. Maybe his sister or mother will find him. Or maybe it is his only daughter, who he had raised alone.

Tommy does not go to sleep that night, nor the following. The man's face haunts him in his sleep, and he wakes up to the whispers of his ghost. But Tommy must kill, to survive. His peers do not begin missions as early as he does, but his number is Sixteen and he is different. Sixteen is smart and quick like the Graduates. The Teachers catch on early, and send him on missions with Dream at first, lurking in the background, before he completes his first, alone.

Tommy remembers the cold nights and numb skin. He remembers feeling hotter than the scorching sun, but cold enough for his heart to freeze. He is too young.

The next time Tommy goes on a mission, Dream comes with him. Dream wears his mask, the same white one with holes poked through. All assassins did, to hide their identities from cameras. And if the cameras did pick them up, then The Academy wants them to be known. They want to show off their students in vain, as the objects; the trophies they are, as if screaming: *'Look at us. Look at what we're capable of.'*

Tommy wears a red and black mask. Red is his favorite color. It's also easier because the blood that stains will not be seen.

Tommy remembers the second person he kills, this time a woman in her late forties.

He hesitates at the trigger.

"Shoot," Dream whispers beside him. "*Shoot*, Theseus."

But Tommy can't. She is asleep and will die alone. She appears younger in her sleep, seemingly in her early thirties. She may die once loved, yet she will be forever alone.

"Theseus," Dream says again, louder. "What have I taught you?" His voice turns hard, solid. He is no longer the Dream that smiles between corridors and whispers to persist. He is not the Dream that makes sure he is eating correctly or checking on his bruises after tougher exercises. This Dream has his mask on and is a ruthless killer. But he is also a survivor.

And so will Theseus if he shoots.

"To survive," The boy eventually replies. "You told me to survive."

"So, shoot." And he does.

The night is dead, and Tommy is cold. He's lost track of time, but it's too late and he knows.

He finds memories surfacing, slowly. Of the first mission, he completed, of the first sibling he kills. He remembers it all and hates himself for it.

(Because one day, Tommy forgets. He forces himself to lose the memories of his past, and when Sapnap asks him a question of the man he killed weeks ago – the boy cannot remember. Sapnap tells George, who tells Dream.

They promise to not tell the Headmaster or Teachers. Because if they find out, the boy will be dead.

Dream watches the boy, his eyes calculating. He concludes that his mind has chosen to repress the memories, and they will return within time. The boy can remember his lessons and teachings – he would be dead if he couldn't. But the faces he kills, disappear.

“It might be for the best,” George whispers, with concern. “They’re using him for more missions than we ever did at his age.”)

But now the faces return. Rain pelts down, it may be midnight.

A man in his thirties. Killed in his home. He dies alone.

A single mother to four. Dies at work. She dies alone.

A teenager, Tommy’s age. He works at a gas station and will not return to his younger siblings. He dies, alone.

Tommy’s head spins. He doesn’t know why he went on a walk after his shift at the bakery, and he has no clue why he did not attempt to go home. And now he’s lost, in an unfamiliar street, a situation alike the many he has killed. A bullet to the head and an ‘A’ slashed on a wrist with a sharp knife – The Academy’s routine for deaths – and Tommy will receive what he deserves.

Although truly, Tommy deserves a harsher punishment. He’s killed more than he can count, and the repercussions are their haunting faces and whispers. Tommy’s heart races, he struggles to breathe. He wants Dream. He wants him to know that Tommy’s not angry, he just feels confused, alone, and sad. The emotions are simple words, but they feel worse. They rush through his veins and pump through his blood.

Tommy stumbles into a corner store. The lights are dim, flickering every once or twice. There is a man at the counter, but Tommy doesn’t pay him attention.

“You okay, kid?” His words are not warm like Niki’s, but they do show concern. It confuses Tommy even more because people should not care – even a little bit – because he is a stranger and they do not know that he’s a killer, a murderer. They do not know of the things he has done, and the people he has hurt. Yet, the man still shows concern deep within his voice. “It’s quite a storm outside, and late. Do your parents know you’re out?”

Tommy doesn’t respond, clinging onto the aisle, as he stumbles. The man walks from around the corner, a hand on his shoulder. Tommy flinches.

“Who do you want me to call? Do you have your father’s number with you? Your mother’s?”

Tommy’s throat swells and is raw. He can’t utter out a word, and the man passes him a bottle of water. The boy takes it with shaky hands and almost collapses.

“Sit down,” The man instructs. “I’ll call someone, for you.”

Tommy’s eyes dip closed. His breaths are soft, and light. He remembers a young girl, killed at her birthday party. He remembers a boy with blue eyes, who cries before he dies.

“Give me a number. It’s too dark to let you out alone.”

Quietly, Tommy recites a number. Between his light breaths and chattering teeth, he says the digits that Dream has made him memorize. Dream had to recite the ten numbers once, for Tommy to recall.

Tommy keeps his eyes squeezed closed, but between the darkness he sees, he catches faces of his past. More, as they pile up before he can’t see anything else. He hates who he has become and that his survival equals his selfishness to live whilst the world around him crumbles.

The man speaks behind him, on the phone. “He gave me your number, but he hasn’t told me his name. Yeah, he looks about sixteen. Twelve Guardian Street. Okay.”

There is a girl who is fourteen. She will not graduate or have her first crush. She will not get married and will not have kids. She will not be remembered for the life she lived, rather for the way she died.

It comes back to Tommy quicker. The faces, and the fucking memories that don’t stop. He can’t breathe.

But then strong arms grip his shoulders and gentle whispers reach his ears. “Breathe, Tommy, breathe.”

The same strong hands gripped his shoulders and saved him from drowning waters. They save him from the depths of his mind.

“I’m sorry,” Tommy struggles to say. “I’m sorry, Dream.”

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” he repeats before his voice seems distant and tough again. His arms are still around him. “Thanks, man, appreciate it.”

“No worries. Take care.”

And then they’re back at the apartment, Tommy is changed out of his drenched hoodie into softer clothes that make his numb skin feel a little warmer. Tommy doesn’t realize the time has passed, nor when he changed, but his mind is quite occupied. Luckily, Dream stays with him wordlessly. The TV stays on, neither of them speaks.

“Tommy,” Dream then says quietly.

“I remember.”

His words cause Dream to snap upwards and his arms to drop from the back of the seat. “What?”

“I remember their faces, Dream. All of them.” Tommy opens his eyes. “It hurts. You’re right, I’m fucking weak. I can’t fucking do this.”

“You’re not weak, Tommy,” Dream reassures. “When have I ever said you were?”

“You didn’t think I could make the final mission. I could never have been your fourth because I was too mindless and weak. I couldn’t forget missions while you and Sapnap – and George could complete it so fucking easily. I can’t do it, Dream.”

“You don’t have to, Tommy,” And Dream’s words cause his breathing to quicken. He promises himself that he will not cry. “You’re not an assassin anymore, neither am I.”

“Just because I’m not one anymore, doesn’t mean I can be weak.”

“Well, you don’t have to go through that shit again, you hear me? You don’t have to be as strong as you were before because we’re never going back. We’ll save Sapnap and George, and we’ll be free.”

But Tommy is still tired. He’s tired of feeling like shit all the time. He’s tired of his past and pretending to be okay. He doesn’t want to be weak, but it’s the only thing he feels.

“I’m sorry,” Tommy apologizes again, rubbing his eyes.

“You’re allowed to cry, Tommy. You’re not there anymore.”

“Why aren’t we?” Tommy desperately wants to know. “Why did we leave so soon? Why couldn’t we stay for Sap and George? Why couldn’t you fucking believe in me, that I could graduate?”

Dream presses his lips together, and his green eyes seem a little dimmer, a little less closed, and a little more open to sharing.

And then he says it. “Because I wanted you to be safe.”

“What?” Tommy questions with fire and pain.

Dream combs his dirty blond hair and his green eyes flicker around the room, unable to maintain eye contact. “We all knew the last mission was the hardest, Tommy. It was a possibility we didn’t want to risk, so we left.”

“You didn’t believe I could make it.”

“No, I did.” Dream promises. “I just didn’t want you to.”

“Why?” And Tommy’s tired. So, so tired.

Green eyes flicker to his. Tommy used to think Dream’s eyes seemed like a dark rainforest, surrounded by hail and deadly creatures. But he sees a lightness, an escape from the darker trees to the hope of the bright sun.

“I care about you, Tommy. You’re my brother, and I care about you.”

“Assassins don’t care,” Dream knows this. He followed the teaching for years. “Care is connection and connection is death.”

“You were an exception, Tommy,” Dream admits. “You, Sapnap, and George. I believed in you, but I couldn’t let you go through the shit we did. Because it’s unfair we were forced into that life and I promise you, I promise you kid, that we won’t ever have to go back.”

“I just needed someone to believe me,” And Tommy starts to cry, the first time since the age of ten.

And Dream doesn’t stare at him in disappointment. He’s not strict and bold like he used to stand during training sessions when he’d have to hurt the students if they could not complete their tasks. He’d done so to Tommy a couple of times. Staring with hard eyes and cold fingers that burned Tommy’s cheeks, but he is different now.

He looks at Tommy with love, because he is allowed to. Because they are not at The Academy anymore, and he is allowed to love his little brother.

"I believe in you." Dream expresses, an edge of his voice which displays the true him. "We'll figure out a solution to your memories, and the nightmares that you pretend you don't have." His words allow a small smile from Tommy, which turns into a grimace. "And I promise that you'll be okay. Because I fucking believe in you, Tommy."

He is Dream and he does not feel.

But then he meets George, Sapnap, and Theseus. He falls in love with his best friend and learns to care for others. He hides it behind his scowls and unreadable expressions.

His breaking point is Theseus' second mission. After the first mission, the boy lays in bed all day and skips meals. So, he offers a proposition to the Headmaster, to assist with him. His request is accepted, and he joins Theseus.

Theseus hesitates at the trigger.

"Shoot," Dream whispers beside him. Because if he doesn't, he will die, and Dream cannot let that happen. "Shoot, Theseus."

Eventually, Theseus will shoot. Theseus will survive but will be plagued by their faces. George, Sapnap, and Dream had been but would learn to slowly get over their faces. But Theseus is much younger than them and cannot handle the blood, sometimes screaming, and silent aftermath as they do.

Theseus forgets their faces. Today, he remembers.

His name is Tommy now, but he is plagued by the actions of his past. Dream lays beside him, watching his plain face under the light of the living room. He looks younger in his sleep; he does not look sixteen.

Dream slowly stands up, to walk to his room. His footsteps and careful to not wake up the exhausted boy, because Tommy deserves a good night of sleep for a start. The man walks to his room and collects his guns from his drawers and cupboard. He lays them on his bed and takes out the ammunition. He counts each gun, each bullet, and pulls them back. It's an exercise, which calms his nerves. Which puts his mind to rest before sleep will take over.

Dream returns back to the living room with a blanket. He wraps it around the boy and stares at him for a second. The Academy taught them that the root of all kills was lessons and obedience. To become the best version of assassin they were, required training and exercises. It required teachings from the more experienced. The better fighter was the better taught. The more intelligent, quicker, and cunning individual.

Dream realizes at that single moment of time; he does not need any of those things. He does not need to be the quickest, even if he is. Because as the rumbling spark at the pit of his stomach threatens to explode, Dream realizes that the burning feeling of revenge will allow him to succeed.

The fire of vengeance, to protect the ones he loves and avenge them will allow him to remain on top.

And Dream always receives what he wants. Even if he has to die trying.

Chapter End Notes

ahhh thank you guys so much for all the support! tysm for the kudos, and leave comments because i'll try and respond to any questions :))
next update will hopefully be up by saturday

Danger

Chapter Summary

“What are you even doing?” Tommy’s eyes scan the small words on his screen.

“Grown-up shit,”

Tommy pulls a face. “Is it the shit for Quackery?”

“Quackity,” Dream corrects. “His name is Quackity, and well, yeah it is.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy catches a cold. He does not go to work for a week, and Niki only returns him with warm words and a promise for chocolate cookies when he can come back. Tommy uses Dream’s phone to talk to her, and hands it back to him afterward, with thought.

“Can I have a phone?” Tommy questions, as he is sprawled on the couch. Dream sits next to him, Tommy’s feet by his lap as he types on his laptop.

“No,” Dream responds with no hesitation.

“Why not?” The boy lets out a loud exhale and raises his arms up to stretch. He is bored out of his mind and Dream won’t let him leave the house because of his sore throat and coughs. It’s because he had walked in the rain and was stuck in drenched clothes when he took a walk after his shift at Niki’s. Now, he pays the consequences. “If I had a phone, then Niki wouldn’t have to keep calling you and I wouldn’t have to annoy you. Oh, and I could call you if something happens like at the gas station.”

Dream doesn’t even glance up from his work. “You don’t annoy me,” Because that’s what he extracts from Tommy’s statement. “And it won’t happen again.”

“What if I’m in an emergency?” Tommy racks his brain for reasons a teenager would ask their parents for a mobile. Or in this case, what he’ll have to say, to convince his older brother.

“We both know you can defend yourself,” Dream says, and he’s anything but false. Tommy can defend himself well and won’t need help to do so.

“You don’t train with me anymore,” Tommy groans. “I’ll start slacking and forget how to defend and attack. If I keep this up, then George might actually catch up to me.”

“Fine, if this gets you to stop annoying me.” Dream pushes his laptop to the side and shoves Tommy’s dangling feet to the floor. “Get up.”

“I thought I didn’t annoy you, bitch?” Tommy mutters.

“Thirty pushups,” Dream smirks. “I’ll grab the mats.”

Tommy would complain usually, but not today because he has missed training with Dream and doesn't want to get out of shape. George would make fun of him for a lifetime if he ended up better than the boy, and Tommy will not let that happen. He was in prime shape before they left, not better than Sapnap, but he was getting there. (Of course, he isn't exactly as better as George during sparring, because George is smart and can use with brains to end out on top, but he likes to state that he is.)

When Dream brings out the maps, he forces Tommy to do fifty sit-ups and a hundred jumping jacks for warmup. Training is their game, an area that brings out their specialties. It is a moment that they can bond over, glance and grin. Because although killing is in their blood, exercises, and sparring can still hold as a moment between them.

After their warmups, Dream shows Tommy a new technique which Tommy hasn't learned before. It extends from a headlock to Tommy's legs being swiped back and pulled down. However, instead of pushing him to the ground, Dream shows him how to flip him over, swipe his gun and pocketknives from him, then restrict him to the ground, and use the weapons against him.

Dream demonstrates the technique twice. Tommy gets it in his first go. He leans quickly because at The Academy, he could not afford even the smallest mistakes. So, he learned to analyze movements through his mind, as the other students would do.

"Well done," Dream's voice isn't bold, as it used to seem during the classes he would teach. They stare at Tommy with fondness, which is quite confusing because he's unused to his older brother being so laid back. "We'll spar now."

And they do. Tommy's never beat Dream, before. Dream has never lost to Tommy.

Tommy waits for Dream to start first. He starts off hard and fast, swinging his arms to catch Tommy off guard, and aiming for Tommy's jaw. But he misses purposely, wrapping his arm around his neck to slam his head downwards.

Tommy stops him before he can do so, his left arm reaching for Dream's torso, and his legs pulled upwards to kick his face. Dream stumbles, but he stands strong, his legs locking around Tommy's neck to shove him down.

Tommy breathes in for a second as Dream throws a punch, rolling so he narrowly misses. He pulls his leg to swipe him down, but Dream has always been smarter and faster, able to connect Tommy's future steps and using them against him.

They continue, Dream using his strength to knock Tommy down and use his arms to deflect the hits Tommy brings his way. His stance is more attacking, while Tommy defends himself as he is shoved around. But then he uses Dream's technique, twisting his arm back to hear a yelp, and locking his arms around his neck, before swiping his legs down.

Only Dream has the upper hand. He is the Teacher and Tommy is a student. Before Tommy can flip him over, he grips onto Tommy's arm, pulling him down with him. He then uses his leg to keep Tommy's legs down and uses his free arm to swipe the knife strapped to his leg.

He uses to weapon against Tommy, holding it to Tommy's chin. "You lose."

"I haven't tapped out, bitch." Tommy mutters under the harsh glare of the glittering knife. But he does once his struggles to escape Dream's grip fails. He would have had a slap to the cheek, or wrist if he was lucky if they were back at The Academy. But today, Dream pats him on the shoulder and smiles.

“Good work,” Tommy doesn’t know why, but compliments from Dream, Sapnap, and George have always meant the most to him. Maybe he craves validation from his elders, whose opinions truly mattered. “Now go rest, I don’t want you to be sick forever.”

Tommy helps Dream return the mats back to their spare room before they both collapse on the couch again. Instead of laying down, facing the ceiling, Tommy sits by Dream, his face in front of the older’s laptop screen to see what he’s doing. Dream exhales loudly, pushing Tommy’s blond curly locks away, as he covers the screen.

“What are you even doing?” Tommy’s eyes scan the small words on his screen.

“Grown-up shit,”

Tommy pulls a face. “Is it the shit for Quackery?”

“*Quackity*,” Dream corrects. “His name is Quackity, and well, yeah it is.”

“What even is your job? You never really explained it to me.”

Dream’s fingers stop typing for a brief moment. This spikes Tommy’s interest rate from mildly interested to curious. “He has a type of investigative business. I help him find people and research about them.”

“Investigating? What?”

Dream is really thinking out his answers. “I’ll tell you the truth, but I don’t want you—”

“Shut the fuck up and tell me already,” Tommy interrupts. Dream flicks his forehead, and he scowls.

“Quackity finds bad people. Well, I find them for him. Then he hires others to get rid of them.”

Dream stares at Tommy, waiting for a reaction. He almost looks nervous. Maybe he thinks Tommy will lash out and tell him that he’s against what he’s doing.

But Tommy ends up bursting out in laughter.

“What?” Dream chuckles, not expecting Tommy’s outburst. His eyes gaze at the boy’s face, not exactly used to his laughing expression. Because at The Academy, he was always frowning and tough looking. When he was around them at least he would crack a couple of jokes here and there. But finally, Tommy can be a kid. He can be sixteen and not told otherwise.

“You looked nervous,” Tommy explains between chuckles. “Dream is never nervous, and you were then.”

“What are your thoughts on it?” Dream seems sincere.

Tommy shrugs his shoulders and folds his hands behind his head, comfortably. “He gets rid of shitty people, so I’m okay with it. If they deserve it, then there’s nothing wrong with it. A better change from The Academy.” Where they’d kill whoever, they were told to. Tommy had found out exactly the extent when they left – rich people paid The Academy to complete tasks. The harder the jobs, the more money they made.

“Although,” Tommy then says. “How did you even get a job this good?”

Dream sighs as if he was expecting a question like this. As assassins, they are trained to ask

important questions. “He, well, he knew Sapnap.”

“What the fuck?” Tommy exclaims.

“Yeah,” Dream scratches his forehead, thinking. “I don’t know the exact details, but while we were planning an escape, Sapnap told me about him so I could maintain a steady income and we wouldn’t be kicked out of here.”

“I want to meet Quackity,” Tommy nods his head, a glint of mischief playing in his blue eyes.

“Maybe once you’re not sick.”

“I feel better!” Tommy thinks the universe hates him because he starts a round of coughs as soon as the words leave his mouth. Horrible timing, considering the coughs had been on the down low all day. Before, he could not afford to be sick. It wasn’t an excuse to skip classes and lessons, so the Teachers made sick students go through each class until they collapsed. Even so, they’d be forced up and continue. Weakness was prohibited. Any type of it.

This reminds Tommy of George’s colorblindness. He had to hide it from everyone because if he had been found out, it would be his diminish. George could not afford it.

Tommy remembers how he found out. While George told Sapnap and Dream, Tommy discovered on his own. He had made George return with his green gloves, he had forgotten in a training room, and he returned with a bright shade of yellow that belonged to another student.

Small memories like those made Tommy chuckle lightly. Because although The Academy was pure, and utter shit and consisted of days in which dying seemingly was a better option than continuing – his brothers made it a little better. Tommy hopes one day, to see Sapnap and George again. So, they can create more memories, and enjoy life together.

Though, what he has with Dream, is enough for now.

Theseus arrives at the swimming center at the early hours of the night. Students must return to their dorms at ten sharp, to wake up at six the following morning. Eight hours of sleep cannot be taken for granted especially due to the harsh repercussions if one was found slacking off.

Theseus lives off three hours of sleep and can still perform at his best. He is not able to fall asleep on his hard bed and cushion of rock. So, he finds himself at the swimming center, where at day, students complete endless drills. He had witnessed one of his siblings drown in the following waters. His name was Benjamin, and his class watched as he died.

They were not allowed to help him and watched as he helplessly sunk under the dangerous waters. He was taken away not long after, his body was buried outside, and an unmarked tombstone and a wilting flower to take his place.

In the day, the water is lurking. It has strong arms, and an even stronger grip, ready to create the same fate as Benjamin's for any other student. At night, Theseus notices how the water seems gentler. There is no longer the harshness, as the water drifts slowly, the center seeming less like a prison for the students. Lessons included swimming laps and laps until your stomach pained and your feet felt stiff.

But Theseus isn't here to practice laps. His form is as good as it can be, and his endurance is one of the best in the class.

He's going to practice holding his breath underwater.

Theseus throws his white-sleeved shirt to the floor and edges closer to the water. His feet dip through, and the hairs on his back freeze.

"Theseus?" A voice. "What are you doing up?"

Theseus knows it isn't a Teacher. He is Sixteen to them. He is Theseus to Dream, Sapnap, and George.

But he knows it's Dream as soon as he hears his name leave his lips. "Hey Dream," Theseus doesn't look back.

"You should not be here." Dream stands next to him, crossing his arms across his chest. His muscles bulge, and he frowns. "Are you practicing laps?"

"No," Theseus shakes his head, staring down at the water. He is reminded of a couple of days ago when he'd been in the water a second too long and Dream had saved him from a horrible fate. The new scars on his arms are a reminder of the repercussions Dream faced, for tampering with the exercise.

"Then what are you doing?" Dream questions, calculated.

"I'm going to practice holding my breath," Theseus mutters. "You got a problem with that, bitch?"

"Wait for one of them to catch you with that mouth of yours." Dream sighs. "Go to sleep, Theseus. I don't want to call a Teacher on you."

"I know you won't." Dream knows that too. "I'll be quick, Dream. You can go now." It's a lie, he will be here for a while. Until he can hold his breath for long enough. He will not make the same mistake twice.

Dream must know Theseus will not back down from his words. "I'm supervising. You need one after last time."

"Fuck you."

"Start before we're caught."

Theseus does. He jumps into the water and waits a couple of seconds. Dream takes out a timer from the storage room. Once Theseus' whole head sweeps under the water, Dream will start the timer.

Underwater, Theseus comes to peace with his mind. It's just him and the water. Maybe Dream will be by the pool, but it does not matter right now. Because a memory appears in the boy's mind. One, which he only witnesses when he is alone with himself.

He sees a mother and a father. He sees a past, a family. He sees love.

During the early minutes underwater, he sees their blurry faces in between the void of blackness and nothing. The following faces have been programmed out of his mind, just as his life before the age of ten. Because he was born again at the age of then. His time before was another life.

Sometimes, Theseus will remember more. When they were eleven, the students who asked for people from their past were taken away, returned a week later with patches and bruises and emotionless faces. So Theseus keeps it to himself. He cannot remember much, though.

But today, the blurs of his mother and father duplicate, two new faces standing beside them. He sees long hair and tall figures.

Sisters, his mind echoes.

He has never seen the secondary blurs before, and they disappear quickly. He loses track of time and has forgotten to start counting, to control his time underwater. Dream will be displeased when he hears.

What Theseus doesn't expect is for the blurs to reappear. Only their faces seem rougher, and names ring through his eyes. Names that he can't decipher yet feel so familiar. They ring through his mind and wash the water out of his ears. They are his past brothers, he concludes. Two, from the life of before. Like Dream, Sapnap, and George, they are his brothers.

Theseus cannot breathe, then. His body lifts from the water suddenly, and he gasps for air. He hears Dream stop the timer and state a number – somewhere within six minutes. But Theseus does not care, he only recalls the two faces of the past and the names which he cannot pinpoint.

"Theseus?" Dream calls for Theseus, as he gets out of the pool, wordlessly. "You did well."

Theseus nods his head wordlessly. Two faces. Two faces he can't recognize, although he wishes for more than anything he can. Dream tells him to go back to bed, and for once, he does not resist.

Once, he had a family. A mother, father, love, and now, two siblings. But Theseus will never remember them more than the blurs of his memories. His mind is wiped when he enters The Academy. They are not his family anymore.

Theseus falls asleep that night with wet hair and dreams of a life which he cannot have. Maybe in another universe, in another lifetime, he will experience this. But now, he is a student of The Academy, and his future is to become an assassin and kill for a chance of survival.

Dream gives Tommy two rules in the car, as he expects the younger boy to follow when they arrive at Quackity's. Tommy is only now finding out that this guy runs *Las Nevadas* a huge company, which owns multiple casinos, nightclubs, and complexes around the whole state. Their central hub is located not too far away from their apartment, where they run their secret business.

Dream's first rule for Tommy is to not talk to anyone. His second is for Tommy not to wander off anywhere without him.

Tommy doesn't appreciate being behind kept on a leash. "C'mon Dream," Tommy pleads. "At least let me gamble shit."

"With what money?" Dream raises an eyebrow in his direction, but his eyes stay on the road. "You're underage anyway."

"I look twenty-one," Tommy reasons.

"You have a babyface," Dream says, before adding calmly, under his breath. "Little boy."

"The fuck?!" Tommy shouts. "I don't look a day over eighteen, you fucking bitch."

"Colorful words for a child," Dream deadpans and Tommy punches his shoulder. "Promise me that you'll follow my rules. They're simple for a child like you to follow."

"Shut the fuck up," Tommy groans.

"Tommy."

"Dream," Tommy snaps back. "Fine, I'll follow them."

Dream nods his head, thankfully. It doesn't take long for huge letters to appear right in front of their eyes. 'Paradise' the sign says as they enter the district. Huge buildings come in view, more hotels and houses. They drive until a huge center labeled 'LAS NEVADAS' in large bold words stop Dream's car. He parks in an empty slot, waiting for Tommy to stand by his side.

"Don't talk to anyone and stay by me," Dream recites his rules.

"I want to know how Sapnap found out about this guy," Tommy mutters as they enter the building. Tommy watches Dream's carefree stance turns stricter, and his face is passive. "Sapnap out of all people? I'd expect George to have connections, but this seems surreal."

Dream does not say anything. They pass through a reception area, and Dream does not even glance at the woman who sits by the front desk, instead of walking to the elevator with Tommy at his heel. He presses the highest button, and they stand in silence as each room passes.

"Quackity's an interesting guy," Is all Dream says. "I think you'll get along."

The highest room couldn't come fast enough. Tommy's excited for some reason. Dream tugs his arm, and they walk through the hallway, stopping at metal doors, guarded by a man with gold chains.

"Dream," the man nods his head. "And Tommy. I've been waiting to match a name to a face, nice to meet you."

Tommy is about to respond until he remembers Dream's first rule. Dream responds for him. "Is Quackity inside?"

The man chuckles lightly. "No introductions, then. He's waiting inside."

Dream nods, and the man opens the door for them. He smiles at Tommy as the boy steps inside the office.

Tommy does not expect a short man with a large scar across his eye and a large beanie. He expects an older man, with professional attire to match the fanciness of the room. The Mona Lisa could fit in with the room's décor. The wallpaper is a deep maroon, contrasting the light leather cushioning of the couches. The ceilings are high, and there are huge windows to capture the chaos of Paradise.

"Dream," Quackity exclaims. Tommy goes stiff by his brother's side, and his face turns blank. Something about the man brings the inner assassin out of him. "And you've brought your brother – Tommy, correct?"

Dream nods his head. "Tommy wanted to see the place."

Quackity grins, revealing his shiny golden teeth, worth more than their apartment rent as it seems. "Well, Tommy, how do you like it so far?"

Tommy glances at Dream, who nods his head as if silently telling him that Quackity is okay to speak to. "Nice so far," His voice is monotone. Dream is not surprised at Tommy's personality change. He'd regularly swap his expressions at The Academy. Grinning around Dream, to frowning as a Teacher passed by the boys.

"Just like your brother, huh?" Quackity raises both eyebrows. "Not unexpected."

"Did you want to discuss the event next week?" Dream then asks.

"The Red Banquet? It can wait, we have more important things to discuss. Have you located the individuals I spoke about last meeting?"

"I have."

"Great," Quackity grins. "You know Dream, with skills like yours, you could always help around in the other fields. My people need a good teacher. I know you fight well."

Dream freezes. "We made an agreement, Quackity. I'll complete your dirty work. The rest is up to you."

"I wouldn't consider it *dirty* work," Quackity sits in his large brown chair and gestures for the two to take a seat. "How about you, Tommy? You want a job?"

"He's sixteen." Dream butts in. "He's too young."

Tommy and he both know that's false. Sixteen cannot be too young because they started at the early age of ten. They were stripped from their families at that age and forced to forget a life of before. Then they trained for hours every day to become the assassins that The Academy expected them to be.

"I know you have experience in this field, Dream. My team would really value your expertise. Plus, you'll have permanent residence on our grounds – the same for your brother." Quackity bends one of his legs over the other, and leans forward, somewhat to show off his status in the room.

Dream grits his teeth, but he does not allow anger to spread across his features. He is taught against that. Tommy notices the emotion, it's hard not to when they've known each other for so long.

Quackity adds, "Double your current payments as well. A damn good opportunity if I say myself."

"That's enough, Quackity," Dream interrupts. "As much as I value your offer, I can't take it. You know that."

Quackity frowns, and sighs. But regardless, he relents. Tommy zones out as they speak, observing the room a little closer. He takes in the suspicious bookshelf in the corner, untouched books with a layer of dust covering them. His eyes then go to the paintings around, noticing how some of them feel out of place, one with a frame engraved with small and intricate patterns, while a newer one has a blocky frame.

He had been taught this way. Notice the little things out of place. The teachings had assisted him in many missions. One of them being an assassination of a millionaire – one of his more prestigious missions which George accompanied with. He'd been tasked with finding the location of his vault and had calculated every inch of the room to find the location.

When Tommy zones back into the conversation, Quackity is on the phone and drops it down suddenly. "You're wanted on the second floor regarding your research."

"Okay," Dream says, monotone, standing up. "Let's go, Tommy."

Quackity stops him, pulling his arm out quickly. "No, it won't take long. Tommy can stay here with me."

Dream is ready to deny the request, but Tommy quickly interrupts. Maybe he'll be able to get more information out of him. Something about him seems weirdly odd, and he wants to figure out what without Dream interrupting his questions.

"It's fine, Dream. Go."

Dream sends the boy a warning glance. But Quackity steps around the table and places a hand on his brother's shoulder with a strong grip. Tommy's eyes focus on Dream, who stands still. "It's fine, Dream. Leave him with me for a second, I'd like to catch up with the kid."

Dream leaves, however, hesitantly. The glance that he sends Tommy practically screams along the terms of *'I trust you, but I don't trust him. Be careful.'*

As soon as Dream leaves, Quackity sits back down, sending Tommy a lazy smile. His scar on his eye seems more prominent under the harsh glare of the office light, and the boy must refrain himself from questioning him about it.

"You can ask me," Quackity grins. Tommy will not admit he is unsettled by his pinched eyebrows and sharp teeth. "About my scar. Everyone does."

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. "If you want."

"An old friend. Now, enemy, I guess. You ever heard the saying kid, keep your friends close but enemies closer? An important lesson, I learned after the predicament."

Tommy has heard that saying before. Slightly differently though, because at The Academy, all of them were siblings. Tommy had to have a level of trust for each of them, as future missions would include working together. Some must help others, and loyal was deeply valued. However, they were also taught to keep their classmates closer. Because during lessons, and sparring, they were classmates, and everything was a competition to see who would appear on top.

"How'd they do that?" Tommy questions, glancing around the room quietly. Quackity's eyes are on his every movement. "A blade?"

"Of some sort," Quackity snorts.

"It makes you look badass." Tommy compliments.

"I like you, kid. You're a breath of fresh air, around here." Quackity smiles, beckoning the kid closer. "Between you and me, some of my employees can be a bit uptight. Especially your brother over there."

Tommy grins. "Dream is like that, sometimes." Not all the time. Around George, he'd laugh until his cheeks were pink. "Quackity – Big Q – tell me what my brother really does." Now his eyes focus on the man, paying close attention.

Quackity brightens at the nickname. "Well, I'm sure he's spoken to you 'bout the basics of the company. I would be surprised if he didn't, but he'll research and investigate people we get calls about. One of my locations in Chicago will send us basic information of the individuals, and your brother makes our jobs much easier, so we can track them down – and such."

Dream's good at a lot of things, unsurprisingly. So Quackity will value his position because he will be good at what he does.

"I know about Dream's past, Tommy. Not all of it, but a decent amount. I apologize for what you had to go through."

"Not your fault," Tommy shrugs his shoulders, not wanting sympathy. He drops the topic quickly. "How much does he get paid, anyway?"

"Now, now," Quackity smirks. "I can't tell you everything."

Tommy thinks to himself. "Okay then. What can you tell me?"

The man laughs lightly. "That I'm looking for people to hire. People like your brother. I've realized after hiring him, that my team could really use an experience like him. What do you say, Tommy?"

Tommy will not have to deny him because Dream will do it for him. Besides, he's not exactly fond of the idea of continuing assassination work after leaving with Dream. Of course, Quackity's business seems more morally right, but he left for a reason and will not want to return unless he must. But the money is tempting, so is proving to himself that he can be Dream's fourth.

"I'm sixteen," Tommy shrugs his shoulders. "That'd be illegal."

"Tommy," Quackity grins. "Nothin' I do here is legal."

Tommy hasn't let a genuine smile let out on his face in a while, but Quackity seems so easy-going and amusing, it's hard not to.

"I don't mind the sound of that," Tommy says. "I'll consider your offer, then."

Quackity seems to like the boy because he isn't afraid to get comfortable with him. Unexpected, since he probably knows their background and how they were highly trained assassins with no mercy. But Tommy doesn't mind being treated like a normal person, and not identified with the past he was forced into. He begins a story, speaking of how he managed to get his company to where it is today.

Dream returns soon after. His lips are straight, and his eyes are glossed and emotionless. Tommy realizes that he is like that around here, putting up a bricked wall so no one else can analyze him and his past.

“Dream,” Quackity announces. “How did the meeting go?”

“Well,” Dream says strictly. “They’ll finish it off tonight. Is there anything else you wanted to discuss?”

“Nothing we haven’t already. Your brother and I were having a lovely conversation, weren’t we, Tommy?”

Tommy nods his head, ignoring Dream’s searching eyes, to make sure Quackity hasn’t pulled a stunt on him. They both know that Tommy can take him down in a second. Being in a room alone, has allowed Tommy to pinpoint his weaknesses. The limp in his knee and the poorer eyesight from the eye with the scar – and that’s only the start of it.

“We’re leaving,” Dream determines. “Tommy.”

“Bye Tommy,” Quackity grins.

Tommy salutes. “Big Q.”

As Dream and Tommy leave the office, Dream nudges his younger brother with his eyebrow raised. “Big Q, huh?”

“Yeah,” Tommy snorts but his face is blank as they pass two people who Dream nods at. “He gives me a weird feeling.”

“Same,” Dream agrees. “What did he ask you?”

Although Tommy knows Big Q would probably prefer Dream not to know, Tommy has more loyalty for Dream. “Bunch of shit. Asked me to work for him too many times.”

“You said no.” Not a question, a statement.

“Yeah, yeah, I did.”

“Good.” They step into the elevator, and thankfully, it’s empty. “He gets a lot of money from his business; it allows him to work and expand on his casinos across the country. Pretty sure that’s how him and Sap met.”

“No way,” Tommy chews the inside of his mouth before bursting with the realization. “Sapnap has a gambling addiction.”

“No,” Dream rolls his eyes at Tommy’s guess. “A mission ended up with them befriending each other. Even I don’t know most of the details.”

They are silent on their way back to Dream’s car. When they enter, Tommy asks the question on his mind for a while. “You should take it.”

“What?” Dream hums as he turns on the engine.

“I know you don’t want to take the promotion because of me. Would be stupid not to, with the money he’s offering.”

“Tommy,” Dream exhales. “We’re financially stable. Quackity pays me enough already – you don’t need a job either. There’s no point for me to take it.”

“Okay, then,” Tommy nods his head, turning his head to stare out the window. It doesn’t make

sense for Dream not to take the job. Because killing is a second nature, a sixth sense. They kill because they know how to without being caught. They've been taught since the age of ten to analyze their surroundings, how to use weapons with their eyes closed, and take out someone with three directions.

Killing is in their blood. It flows through their veins and wires their mind.

"Taking Quackity's offer will put us in more danger than we're in already. The free accommodation here isn't an offer, it's a necessity in case I'm targeted and found out. Besides, once we free Sapnap and George, we'll only have enough pairs of eyes. I expect you to ignore any offers like that in the future, I already regret letting you come."

Dream will sometimes forget that Tommy is not a kid. Legally, maybe not, but experience-wise – yes.

"I won't," Tommy promises with a dramatic sigh, mocking Dream's protective words under his breath.

"Tommy," Dream warns, because saying his name always sounds more threatening.

"I won't take Quackity's offer. I won't put us in danger."

"You don't put yourself in danger." Dream refuses to start driving until he recites his words. "In Arabic."

"I won't put myself in danger," Tommy recites in Arabic. He's reminded of the long lectures of learning the painful languages and the burns on his skin in consequence when he'd get a phrase incorrect or if he could not perfect an accent.

"In French." Dream says. Tommy says it in French. His back straightens, but he reminds himself that Dream will not hit him if he's wrong. So, he rolls his eyes instead when Dream asks him to recite the words in German. And then Spanish.

"You could work on your pronunciation, *Pequeñito peligro*."

Tommy scowls at Dream's words. *Little danger*, he has said, because Dream will always make fun of his age. "Shut the fuck up."

"You're slacking," But Dream is joking because he isn't expected to remember and recite all the languages he is taught. He's not expected to know or do anything. Dream isn't The Academy. He's only been kind and caring.

It's strange because this is what both the boys have been taught against. Dream should not be so kind, and Tommy should not be so trustful.

But as Dream recites the following lines in the other fifty languages, Tommy knows that one day he can undo the teachings wired to his mind. One day, he can let the past go.

Not today. Not tomorrow. But one day, he will.

Chapter End Notes

hey! originally, this chapter was going to involve tommy + wilbur at the bakery at the

end, but after i finished the last scene, i realised the chapter was way too long. so that will happen next chapter! hope you enjoyed :))

would love to read more comments! they help me update faster (ahahahha)

Friendship

Chapter Summary

Tubbo bombards Tommy with questions.

“How long have you worked here?”

“A couple of weeks.”

“Have you met Wilbur?”

“Unfortunately.” A loud ‘hey!’ is heard from the backroom.

“What’s your favorite food, here?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy shrugs. “The chocolate buns.”

“That is simply incorrect,” Tubbo shakes his head, frowning. “The correct answer is the chocolate brownies, but I won’t fire you.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy begins to adjust to his new life.

He wakes up at six every morning and joins Dream to train and occasionally spar before his older brother leaves for work. He will then read a couple of books they have borrowed from the library, the TV usually playing in the background. Tommy does not like the silence.

Afterward, he will go to the bakery. Niki is sometimes there, greeting him in the morning. He helps her set up, and then they chill in the back room, Tommy sipping a soft drink while Niki tells him about her busy plans for the day. She usually encourages him to contribute to the conversation, but Tommy likes to listen.

Sometimes, Niki leaves early, and Wilbur arrives. The luckier days are when he takes a table at the back to listen to music and work. On the less lucky days, he joins Tommy by the counter and annoys him to no end with stupid questions or stories that the boy couldn’t give a fuck about.

After work, Tommy goes home or to Dream’s workplace. He usually takes the bus majority of the way there and ends up walking the rest. Dream is wary of the people around and will join Tommy by the reception of *Las Nevadas*, and they will spend the rest of the day in his office. It’s quite big and has comfortable couches which is always a bonus. Occasionally, Tommy talks to Quackity.

Dream drives Tommy after the long day and asks him about his day at the bakery. Tommy complains about Wilbur and will give him a summary of his day. They go home and take turns choosing take-out. Tommy tries pizza for the first time a couple days ago. He likes it, but Dream says he’ll start cooking at home more because apparently, the shit they’re eating is unhealthy.

Tommy doesn’t know how to feel about the sudden adjustments. Although he likes being able to

go to sleep at any time he wants, and not be forced to complete exercises anymore (it's all optional now as Dream will only spar with him, if he wants to), there is still a part of him which waits for the burns and bruises on his hands and waits for Dream to lash out. The same part of him waits for the blood and murder and anticipates coming home to find people from his past, ready to drag him back.

But he will put up a fight if he does. Tommy likes his life. He likes his job and his conversations with Niki. He likes spending time with Dream and feeling human.

One thing about The Academy is that they always had a timetable. Days were repetitive cycles, and they did not change. Dream announces a change in their timetable, one morning. They eat eggs and toast in the kitchen when Dream reveals the news.

"Quackity wants me to go to Chicago for a week. He wants to introduce me to the main location and speak to some of the higher-ups."

Tommy goes silent, glancing up from his half-eaten toast. "Okay." He says suddenly monotone.

Dream continues. "I don't want to, but he's made the meeting compulsory for the whole team. I don't want to leave you alone, though."

"I've been alone for six years, I'll be fine," Tommy shrugs and his stomach stirs.

"You weren't alone," Dream reasons. "You had us." Sapnap, George and him.

"Yeah but," Tommy hesitates. "We didn't in a way." They weren't lonely, Tommy thinks. But they were alone.

Dream drops the topic, knowing Tommy will not budge. "I'll tell Quackity I can't make it."

"No," Tommy shakes his head. "This is a good job; you won't find another one like this. I'll be fine alone – besides, it's only a week."

"What if something happens?"

"I can't hold my own," Tommy sighs because Dream will never remember so. "I could call you if I had a phone." He smirks.

Dream stays silent. "I'll get you a phone, then."

Tommy is surprised. "Wait, really?"

"I'll need to contact you, and I want you to contact me if anything happens."

"Yeah, yeah," Tommy doesn't know why he wants a phone. Maybe it's because he's sixteen and believes that whatever annoys Dream (in this case – pestering him to no end) is a better use of his time.

"I'm leaving in two days." Dream then says. "We'll go over the rules later."

Dream likes rules. He likes structure and coordination, and Tommy doing what he tells him to do. Dream also likes control, feeling rather lost without it. It's why he balanced Sapnap and George so well. Sapnap was a catapult of chaos and George was too laid back. Dream controlled Sapnap and made sure George was putting effort into all his tasks.

Tommy and Dream are different. But at the exact time, they're exactly the same. Maybe that's why

they work well together, maybe that's the reason why Dream's eyes shine with pride when he glances at the younger boy, and Tommy only wants to make the older proud.

Although Tommy appreciates Dream's presence and feels better with him there, he will be fine for a week. Seven days. He can't say he isn't used to relying on himself, because he is.

Work is slow, as usual. Tommy wipes down the same counter for the fifth time and rearranges the storage room twice. He cleans the coffee machine and microwave, which are the go-to tasks he completes when he's waiting for customers. Friday evenings are their slow days.

Niki's in the backroom with Wilbur. They discuss something under their breaths and if Tommy could give a fuck, then he'd step closer to the unclosed door to listen. He's not too bothered though, because they're friends and they talk as friends do. In all honesty, Tommy doesn't know because he hasn't had a friend before. He has had Sapnap, George, and Dream but they're more like siblings than anything else. And his 'family' at The Academy could not be considered friends either, as he kept them as rivals and competition at the back of his mind.

Tommy doesn't care though. He has Dream and doesn't need anyone else. Although Dream will be gone for a week from tomorrow, and then he'll have no one.

The door opens and the bell chimes. Tommy musters a smile. "Good afternoon! What can I get you for today?"

"Hey!" A brown-haired boy with recognizable eyes replies with a bounce in his step. Tommy takes a couple of seconds to remember his name, and why he knows him. His name is Tubbo and he played soccer at the park. Tommy scowls himself for being so slow – The Academy taught him better, taught him to be fast.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" Tubbo continues with furrowed eyebrows.

Since Tubbo knows him, well, isn't a customer who he could scare away, he drops the façade and returns to his blank face and tight lips. "I'm Tommy," he answers. "I met you at the park the other day."

Tubbo opens his mouth and lets out a loud 'ohhh'. "That's right! You haven't come around in a while."

"I've been busy," Tommy shrugs nonchalantly. "Um, did you want to order something?"

Tubbo nods his head and grins. "I know Niki personally. She lets me have free brownies."

Tommy can tell he's lying, he could from a mile away. "She's at the back. I could go get her."

"No, no," Tubbo waves his hand to dismiss his statement. "We're friends, aren't we, Tommy? Let me have free shit."

Funny how the universe works, Tommy thinks to himself. He'll be thinking about friends and then this happens. Although Tommy doesn't think they're at the friend stage yet, or really acquaintances. He knows Tubbo's name – and that's really it.

"Tubbo," Niki makes an entrance. "Please don't tell me you're harassing my employees."

"Tommy's my friend. We're simply conversating." Tubbo says the last word like he's unsure it's really a word. "And I wasn't harassing him, Niki. You think so poorly of me."

Niki smiles, leaning on the counter, her eyes on Tubbo as he sits on a stool. "So, if I ask him if you asked for free brownies, he'll say no?" She interrogates.

"He's my friend!" Tubbo reasons.

"Friend?" She glances between them, unsure if he's telling the exact truth.

"He played soccer with us the other day. Well, a few weeks ago."

Niki looks at Tommy, to see if Tubbo's really telling the truth. "Dream made me,"

Niki smiles at him, then. "I'm glad you're talking to others, Toms. I was going to call Tubbo down actually."

"How do you guys know each other?" Tommy questions.

"He's my younger brother," Niki says just as Tubbo sighs, "Older sister." Small world apparently because Tommy's already met two members of their family unknowingly. He won't say he is surprised. They have the same eyes.

Niki goes to grab a brownie for Tubbo, knowing he'll persist until she gives up. Tubbo bombards Tommy with questions.

"How long have you worked here?"

"A couple of weeks."

"Have you met Wilbur?"

"Unfortunately." A loud 'hey!' is heard from the backroom.

"What's your favorite food, here?"

"I don't know," Tommy shrugs. "The chocolate buns."

"That is simply incorrect," Tubbo shakes his head, frowning. "The correct answer is the chocolate brownies, but I won't fire you."

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. "I haven't had brownies before." The Academy had strict diets and deserts swapped between sour fruits or pudding. But Tommy adores sweet things, so Tubbo's answer is probably right even if the question is subjective.

The bakery stills for a second. Maybe the fridge stops working.

"You've never had brownies before?" Tubbo gasps, wide-eyed. Tommy swears at himself because he didn't think it was so irregular. "Niki, I don't want one anymore. Give it to Tommy."

Tubbo makes Tommy sit down on the stool next to him and shoves the treat in his face. Wilbur comes around, leaning on the doorframe to watch Tommy's reaction.

Tommy takes a careful bite, looking away from the three pairs of eyes on him. Niki has said that he's allowed to grab an extra treat during breaks, but he's never done so before. At first, Tommy tastes the chocolate, which soon melts in his mouth. Sweetness explodes, a swift taste of bitterness balancing out the sweet.

"What the fuck?" Tommy mutters.

"Do you like it?" Tubbo asks, excitedly.

"Yeah," Tommy swallows. "It's good." He takes another bite, and then another. "Niki, these are the shit."

"You could have told me," Niki laughs lightly, but something in her eyes looks dull. "I'd let you try all the other treats if you haven't tasted them before."

Tommy does not tell her he has not.

Wilbur pipes up, joining the group. He stands by Niki and his eyes do not leave the blond-haired boy. "You really aren't kidding?"

Tommy thinks of an excuse, quickly. "My brother's a bit of a health freak." Is what he can come up with instead of stating he was raised at an academy for assassins, and due to their provided meals and repetitive meal plans, they did not have the opportunity of eating desserts and treats like this.

Niki looks unsure and Wilbur looks like he doesn't believe him. Tubbo is the only one who smiles brighter, tapping his fingers on the counter. "Have you tried muffins and caramel cakes? Oh god, and lava cakes, those are to die for." Tommy has had sweetish-savory foods, like waffles and pancakes. He has already had muffins, chocolate, and the same puddings that The Academy provided. That's pretty much it.

"Uh," Tommy hesitates. "Maybe?"

"We had to go, big man. I know a good place near here. Well, Niki's are good, but I don't think she'd appreciate us eating her whole store."

"I still have to finish my shift." Tommy doesn't mind Tubbo, but he wants to spend as much time with Dream before he leaves. Even if that means laying on his office couch, watching the man type away as he reads a book from the shelf.

"No, no," Niki interrupts. "I'll let you off early today. Anything for you to talk to someone your age."

"Niki," Tommy groans. "I've missed enough shifts already."

"It's fine," Niki wavers her hand. "Maybe I can teach Will to make a coffee without breaking another machine."

Tommy really doesn't want to, but Niki persists, and he has no choice but to go. Tubbo says he'll wait outside, as Tommy retrieves the jacket that Dream makes him bring everywhere because of the windy weather.

“Niki,” Tommy makes sure Tubbo isn’t close enough to hear. She turns to him, her blonde hair flipping from the ponytail that holds her hair. “Can I use your phone to text my brother?”

“You don’t have a phone?” Wilbur’s very fucking nosy, and judgmental. Another reason to dislike him.

“Are you always so judgmental?” Tommy voices his thoughts.

“I just haven’t met a kid without a phone or tasted brownies before.” Niki glares at Wilbur. “What? I’m just saying the truth.”

“You’re a prick, Wilbur,” Tommy passes the phone back to Niki and scowls at the man.

“Stop you two,” Niki places a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, and he tries not to freeze. Even a small touch of contact will beckon him towards his boot, where his knife is kept. The Teachers used to press their nails down on his shoulder, and whisper things he did not want to hear. It triggers something inside of him, and he’s close to snapping. But he used to be an assassin and he used to not feel. He used to endure the contact and be forced to keep a still face.

He's not Theseus anymore. He's only Tommy.

“Tommy?” Wilbur looks concerned and Tommy might gag at the way his eyes look at him warily. “You zoned out for a second.”

“I have to go,” Tommy doesn’t miss the exchange between them. “Don’t want to keep Tubbo waiting.”

“Stay safe” Niki says lightly.

Tommy gives her a two-finger salute, the wind ruffling his hair and the sight of the fallen Autumn leaves, a reminder of the passing time.

“Somethings up with that kid,”

“I know Wilbur,” Niki sighs, exhausted. “He comes to work tired and zones out a lot. I see it too.”

Wilbur frowns.

“I am really worried. I’ve tried to give him more breaks and cut his hours.” Niki walks around to one of the chairs and sits down. Wilbur leans on the counter, his chin on his palms. “I’ll give him time; I wouldn’t want to scare the kid off.”

“He’s never had brownies before,” Wilbur says in disbelief. “So maybe his brother is a health freak, but something isn’t right.”

“I’ve met him before,” Niki says lowly. “His name is Dream, but he didn’t seem off. Tommy

didn't either when they came to the store.”

“Dream,” Wilbur says slowly, under his breath. “Weird ass name.”

Niki chuckles lightly. “I’ll keep an eye on Tommy, and he and Tubbo are already friends – I think. When I’m not around, make sure he’s doing alright.”

“You know I will,” Wilbur nods his head and reaches for an apron. Since he has the time, he might as well take Niki’s lessons. Even if it’s learning how to prepare a white coffee. “Although he has a tenancy to call me a bitch, I’ll look out.”

“That’s the spirit,” Niki claps her hands once. She hopes Tommy is okay. She hopes he goes home to a warm bed and that his older brother treats him right. A part of her sees herself in him; a teenager looking for help but too scared to ask. She remembers turning eighteen and driving Tubbo away from their old life and finding a small motel to stay. She remembers struggling to make ends meet and then meeting Wilbur. He had introduced her to his family, and she and her brother moved in with them.

Niki then reached out. Niki spoke to people and opened up. Niki opened a bakery – the sight of her dreams and finally moved into an apartment. It will get better; she wishes she could tell her younger self. Maybe, one day, she can tell Tommy.

Tubbo is not bad company, Tommy is just not used to it.

With Dream, conversations run with him speaking about a topic and Tommy interrupting. But Dream doesn’t mind and listens. They both do, regarding topics they share. The other day, there had been a knife-throwing contest playing on the TV. While Dream went on about their technique was wrong, Tommy stood up, swinging his knife around, showing off as if the man on the television could see him. Dream made him put the knife away, but they ended up rolling in laughter at the commentators not understanding shit.

Dream’s laugh is weird. It’s like he forgets to breathe for a second. Tommy’s is too, not that he’d admit it. It’s sometimes weird, realizing that not too long ago, Dream’s eyes would have frowns of their own as they stared at the TV since he never did laugh.

With Tubbo, he goes on and on about random shit, mostly which Tommy does not understand. But he won’t interrupt because he doesn’t want to be rude.

(“Let Theseus be Theseus,” Dream defends him from Sapnap. The boy with fire eyes had shouted at the boy for bursting into laughter at one of George’s jokes.

“You can’t be serious,” Sapnap deadpans. “If a Teacher catches him, he’ll be dead. Surely, you’re not this stupid.”

Dream’s lips thin. “They won’t hear him.” He defends, but turns to Theseus, anyway. “Sapnap is

right, though. You don't want to be heard.")

Tommy can joke around with Dream because he puts up with him. Tubbo may be different from him, he may feel frustrated cutoff. But Tommy sees his laughy smile and cheery eyes and knows he won't mind.

Tommy's not used to this. So, he takes it in, before he will let go. And he lets Tubbo speak, while he listens to his voice and the distant sound of the tree leaves rustling under the gentle touch of the wind.

"You good, big man?" Tubbo glances at him as they walk down the sidewalk to the place that apparently has the best muffins (apart from Niki's bakery, since he's biased and cannot say otherwise). "You haven't spoken in a while."

"Yeah, I'm okay," Tommy shrugs, shoving his balled-up hands in his pockets.

"If you say so," Tubbo gives him a side glance. "We should hang out and place soccer again. Oh yeah, I think they're all planning to meet up tomorrow. You should join us."

"Who's 'they'?" Tommy asks.

"My friends," Tubbo says. "Wilbur can come if you want since you're not very familiar with anyone else. He's funny considering his age."

"No, no, it's fine," Tommy will not spend more time with Wilbur than necessary. "I'll see if I can make it, man." He'll have a shift at Niki's, but afterward, he will be free since Dream will be gone by then. Although Niki will likely cut down his hours if Tubbo brings it up in front of her. He needs to talk about that with her, he reminds himself.

"What do you do in your free time?" Tubbo questions out of the blue. Tommy forces his mind to escape the train of thought of assuming Tubbo's asking the following questions for the wrong reasons. He is asking the questions because they are 'friends' and friends ask each other questions. "Besides working at Niki's."

"I read," Tommy thinks. He also spars with his brother, relives his traumatic past and dreams of death. "I watch movies, but that's pretty much it. I'm boring."

"What type of movies?" Tubbo questions and he sounds genuinely interested.

"Horror, thrillers," Tommy thinks he's being awkward. He's an extrovert when he wants to be. Tommy won't add that he and Dream watch murder mysteries together and pinpoint every mistake that the movies preface. They used to do the same thing at The Academy, which was more considered lessons instructed by their Teachers. A slap to the back of their wrist if they got an answer wrong. Now, they just chuckle at the inaccuracies of the fiction.

"That's cool," Tubbo nods his head. "There's a new movie that came out last week. I forget what it's called, but we can go watch it."

Now Tommy isn't afraid to show his apprehensiveness, hidden before. He furrows his eyebrows and doesn't know what to say.

"Tubbo?"

"Yeah?" The boy turns to him again.

“Are we friends?” The Academy was meant to teach them everything. But Tommy’s social skills are poor, and he can’t figure this out because he is so unused to it.

Tubbo does not hesitate. “Yes. We are.”

Tommy will not smile, but he wants to. “Okay.”

The shop is named ‘Bad’s Muffins’ and Tubbo makes an unfunny joke about the name.

“The muffins aren’t bad, I promise.”

He’s not wrong, though. The owner’s name is Bad – hence the name – and he greets the boys like they’ve known each other for years. Though, Tommy realizes that he and Tubbo are good friends by judging their mannerisms and body language.

They order muffins and extra treats, on Tubbo. Tommy finds himself relaxing for the first time in a while, without Dream present. Although his hand may check his knife is securely in place once or twice, he finds himself enjoying himself. The Academy will be disappointed when they see him. He speaks with Tubbo closely, and they make jokes as they talk about meaningless discussions. Tommy steers away from uncomfortable topics and Tubbo does not push.

Tommy has never had a friend before. It’s nice, he realizes. Speaking to someone and not being on edge. Not having to see them as a rival or talking about something he does not want to. Tommy forgets The Academy exists during their conversation, which is a first. The muffins are really good. Tubbo smiles a lot. Bad joins them, properly introducing himself to Tommy.

Outside, the orange leaves fall.

Tommy wonders how long this will last.

Dream is leaving.

He hands Tommy a burner before he does. “Call me when you need me. Or well when you want to. I promise I’ll pick up.”

Tommy takes it. It’s his first phone.

“Keep the key in the fruit bowl so you don’t lose it. And close the curtains in your room because you somehow manage to forget.”

“Dream,” Tommy says, softly. “I’ll be fine.”

“I know you will.” His green eyes are *worried*, but there is always a first for everything. “I know you are fine by yourself, but you shouldn’t be. You’re only sixteen.”

“I’m not a kid,” Tommy tries to sound playful. When did he become so dependent? So reliant? The Academy may not recognize him, but even he cannot recognize himself.

“Yes, you are,” Dream says back. “If you’re in trouble, then call me. And if for some reason, then tell Niki. Tell someone, Tommy. You’re not at The Academy anymore.” You’re not alone, is what he says but won’t admit aloud.

“Go already,” Tommy jokes, shoving his shoulder. “You’re so fucking dramatic, Dream.”

“Be safe,” Dream lectures, before adding. “Idiot.”

And then, Tommy is alone.

Tommy glances around the room, wearily. He breathes in, taking in the cold surroundings. The rooms seem dimmer than Dream’s left. Lonelier. It’s only seven days, Tommy reminds himself. Five days, if Dream can finish everything up fast enough.

Tommy despises Quackity for a moment. For causing Dream to go away. But the same man had offered Tommy come with them, only for Dream to decline, so he shouldn’t be angry. He used to do missions alone, for goodness’ sake. He would sleep in his empty chamber for years, the surrounding rooms emptier than the other students... passed.

Tommy is tired. He is exhausted. He should sleep more.

Tommy sees faces at night, in his dreams. So, he stops closing his eyes. Tommy stops sleeping.

(“Tell me,” Dream pushes. “What’s wrong? Tell me about the nightmares.”)

“I see their faces,” Tommy squeezes his eyes closed. “Make it stop.”

“Talk to me, Toms,” But Tommy doesn’t, because he can’t.)

He stays up that night, sitting on his soft sheets and he stares at the empty walls. Faces dance around him. One has a bullet through his right eye. The others don’t have eyes, black voids that make Tommy fear sleep.

Tommy is disgusting. He is a monster. He peers down at his hands, the reddest blood sinking to his skin. Whispers travel around the room.

Look what you did to us, they say. Look at who you are.

Don’t forget, they remind him. And he won’t.

He doesn’t deserve to live and move on, when the people of his past are buried under their graves. Dream says he wants Tommy to live like a kid, be sixteen because if he deserves anything, then it’s that – but Tommy doesn’t agree. He doesn’t fucking deserve the second chance he has. He doesn’t deserve his friends, his jobs, and his caring brother who fucking cares too fucking much.

So, Tommy drowns in silence.

“You are Sixteen,” The Teacher states.

“I am Sixteen.”

“You are a student of the Academy. You are an assassin.”

“I am a student of the Academy. I am an assassin.”

“You don’t feel. You don’t deserve to.”

Tommy recites their words.

“You are a monster,” They tell him. “You don’t deserve love. You don’t deserve anything. You are replaceable.”

He is Sixteen and he does not deserve love or anything. He is replaceable. But he is only ten years young.

“Today, you will learn to survive. If you do not think you can, say now.” And they will kill him.

“I will survive.”

“Good,” they say. “Join your siblings. They will show you to your chamber.”

As he leaves, he hears the boy after him. “*You are Seventeen,*” he hears them say before he is taken away.

Tommy relives the memory, alone. He wonders why he wanted to survive so badly. He wonders why he is allowed to be so selfish because his survival always meant others’ deaths. Dream wants him to survive, though. He wants him to live.

But what if Tommy is sick of living? Feeling like shit and nothing at all at the same time? He’s sick of running and feeling not like himself and being someone, he is not.

What does Tommy do, if he doesn’t want to survive anymore?

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! i loved reading the comments on the last chapter sm they were so sweet
thank you :))

leave kudos and comments if you can!

was going to update this earlier but george is streaming so uh. next update should be
up before sunday!

Alliance

Chapter Summary

One day, Theseus kills and feels nothing.

He does not see their faces again. Nor does he the next mission. Or the other one after.

He recalls George's previous teaching. We are taught to not care, but we do because we are human, he says in the past.

Theseus is a monster. He will kill, he will pull a gun to someone's head and will no longer hesitate when he kills. He is a monster because he is not satisfied. He is satisfied that he is like Dream, George, and Sappap. He is happy to be their fourth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George is made of calculating eyes and quick thinking. He assists in lessons, and Theseus sits up straight, his eyes edging into the dark brown eyes of the boy. He asks a question and picks on a student. He must use their numbers, as everyone does.

When he is alone with him, he calls him Theseus.

"Sixteen," It's Theseus' turn now and he sits up straighter. "Recite it in Russian."

Theseus recites the statement in Russian, the words rolling from his lips. He does not make a mistake and George does not smile. "Correct. Eighteen—" He picks on the next student.

George shows the least emotion of the three. Dream may not like to admit it, but he will at times, have a light in his eyes when he accompanies his friends. His façade is strong and bold so no Teacher will see through it. Sappap shows anger and fury at times with burning eyes. But George is cold and blank-faced.

Theseus admires him. He admires his strongness and perseverance. He admires George's lack of care, and ability to finish a task without caring if he fails. Theseus wonders if George has accepted his fate already and recognizes the consequences of his failure. Theseus wants to be like him.

He asks one day. He is the last in the training room and asks George a simple question. "How do I be like you?"

George gazes over at him with plain eyes.

"How are you so uncaring? I've seen you be stabbed by Sappap before, you pulled the knife out and could not give a shit." It had occurred in one of their demonstrations. George's skin was red of blood, yet his eyes did not show an ounce of pain or hurt.

"I knew the truth the day I arrived here," George explains as he pulls the knives lodged into the targets from practice. "I knew I was going to die here, so I forced myself to accept it."

George is ten when he accepts death.

“Teach me,” Theseus pleads.

“The difference between you and I,” George continues. “Is that you have a will to survive – a strong one, maybe the strongest. Dream sees it, recently Sapnap has too. The other students fear the future, they believe that they will die here. They have not accepted it yet, though. While you, Theseus, are determined to live.”

Theseus says nothing.

“I envy you and Dream in that sense,” George shrugs lazily and stretches his arms back, playing with the knives between his fingers. “I wish I could want to live more than you, but I can’t. I’m okay with dying.”

George stops caring out of acceptance. He will be stabbed, he will be shot over and over again. He knows there is a timer above his head. He knows his death will be here. But George is okay with that.

“We do not care. We do not feel. But we do.” George says. “We are human, of course, we do.”

Theseus says nothing.

“Maybe I’m not, then – a human.” George sighs. “Because I don’t care anymore.”

One day, Theseus kills and feels nothing.

He does not see their faces again. Nor does he the next mission. Or the other one after.

He recalls George’s previous teaching. *We are taught to not care, but we do because we are human*, he says in the past.

Theseus is a monster. He will kill, he will pull a gun to someone’s head and will no longer hesitate when he kills. He is a monster because he is not satisfied. He is satisfied that he is like Dream, George, and Sapnap. He is happy to be their fourth.

Tommy lays surrounded by the people of his past and feels.

He sees their faces and his heart is on flames.

Between them, he sees George's whispers. He is told that he is human and is meant to feel. But Tommy has murdered and doesn't deserve to be labeled as one because he is a monster.

"I envy you," George of the past says. *"You, Theseus, are determined to live."*

"Sorry to disappoint," he mutters and passes out.

Tommy hates the apartment. Maybe, it's because Dream is gone, and everything feels dead. So, he leaves.

He does not have a shift today. Dream has only left early this morning, and Tommy has been asleep all day. The sun in the sky reminds him that he still has time before darkness will conquer the sky.

He has two messages on his phone, both from Dream who is his only contact. The first one asks him if he's okay and the second asks him if he has eaten. Tommy will not break one of his immediate rules and texts him back a quick message – that he's fine and hasn't eaten yet, but that he will.

He shoves the phone in his hoodie and walks through the town alone. He will head to the main part of town and find something to eat. Something healthy, so he does not have to lie when Dream asks him.

He ends up at a burger shop, and stares at the menu, his eyes threatening to close and for him to fall asleep. He hasn't slept for a week. There are only three others in the store. One of them sits on the corner booth with their computer, while the two others wait for their orders.

Tommy's eyes blink to concentrate, but the screen with the menu makes his eyes hurt. He can hardly read the small words and relies on the pictures to make his order.

"Are you ready to order?" The woman with red uniform questions Tommy.

Tommy sighs quietly. "I'll have, a, um, vegetable burger."

"Toppings?" He recalls Dream's order from the other day. Another one of their take-out nights, when Dream's burger tasted better than his.

"Uh, tomatoes, onions, and pickles."

The woman nods and Tommy passes the correct number of coins to her. He is quick at math and does not have to glance at the coins for more than a second, since The Academy would force equations into his mind. They were trained to be the very best and excel in every form.

George was always the best. Tommy was okay at languages and did quite well in mathematics, but George stood strong above the rest.

Tommy's order number is called. He takes the paper bag wordlessly and leaves the store. The food in his hands feels like a heavy burden he must carry, but he will eat for Dream. He doesn't want the older boy to return home with a wonder why the money he has left behind is unused.

Tommy also doesn't realize how much Quackity pays him until today. The money he has left behind is quite an excessive amount. Tommy could buy deserts from a more expensive store every night, with what Dream has left.

The town square is filled with people, teenagers laying on grassy fields in circles and adults on dates. He passes the park, where children ride on scooters and throw objects in the air for their dogs to catch. The sound of children's laughter and parents scowling bring a light feeling to the air, which Tommy avoids as he dodges past people with his paper bag secured firmly in his grip.

He finds a park bench located away from the majority of people. He slumps on a seat and unwraps the burger. The first bite reveals that it tastes well, not as good as the one he had the other day, but he does not dislike it. Tommy pushes himself to finish, and his eyes grow heavier. He can't go to sleep though, he refuses to. He needs something to do, something to take his mind off... everything. He'd usually have Dream in this situation, and back at The Academy, he had Sapnap and George to rely on.

Now, he's alone again.

The Teachers aren't the only obstacle that the students face. Nor is it the lessons they are taught or the missions they must complete to continue. One of their biggest obstacles is each other.

"You are siblings," They are introduced to each other by. "These are your brothers." Their sisters are taken away after the first day. Theseus will not see them for a long time. "But you are also rivals. You are each other's competition."

They are taught of the tight bonds of family and the fierce loyalty that comes with it. But they are also taught to keep enemies closer. They must not be friends and taught against it. However, The Academy is not against alliances. A bare trust, which is needed to proceed through lessons.

But they are taught against trust. They are disciplined and controlled. They learn that loyalty has its limits.

Theseus does not want friends. He pushes through alone until he meets Dream. Dream is not competition, as he has already graduated. He can rely on him and learns to along with Sapnap and George.

Loyalty has its limits, he writes on lined paper until his fingers are numb and his thumb is sore. But how can he untrust someone who is more loyal than him? He becomes what he is taught against

and must hide it.

“We must not make friends, to survive,” Dream tells him one day. “But you can rely on me, and I will always help you.” *So you live. So you survive*, he does not say.

Sapnap hates him when they meet. But now, they like each other. “George and I are here too. After all, you are our fourth.”

Over the years, Theseus notices how his siblings change. His eyes watch in observance, and he notes how the spread-out students, who would sit far apart from each other, now sit in groups. He used to share a table with other silent students, but they have either disappeared or found others to sit with.

They make alliances, not connections.

Theseus finds out the hard way.

They corner him after three hours of training. Their faces are made up of jealousy because they know Theseus is the predicted fourth and the best. More graduate, but Theseus will be the most honored. In Dream’s year, ten of thirty graduated. Sapnap’s was the same, ten. George’s was only five.

They will keep the strong. The weak do not graduate.

“What?” Theseus questions them as he is tasked to clean up after training. They must return to the dining hall, otherwise, they will skip mealtime – which is the part of the day that cannot be devalued.

“You,” One of them shoves him, but Theseus does not stumble, staring at them with disbelief. He covers it up quickly, turning stone. “Sixteen, the one who thinks he’s so good.”

“Theseus,” The shorter one with dark eyes blurts out loudly. There are many Sixteens, due to the separate graduating classes. They refer to each other by their names sometimes, not around Teachers or the Headmaster. “You think you’re good enough to be their fourth?”

Theseus stays silent, staring them down.

“Too good to speak to us?” They say and knock him down. The middle one has a height advantage and pushes him down. But one thing they are taught is that height does not matter if they are not strong. Nothing matters if they aren’t good fighters. And Theseus is considered the best for a reason. He does not allow any of their punches to reach his face, as he rolls to the side, throwing his arm out to shove the others to the ground.

Their unbalance pushes him upwards. He presses his hands to the shoulders of the taller guy and kicks him in the stomach.

As they fight, his name comes to Theseus’ mind. He is One. His name is Curtis. Theseus observes his classmates and remembers him well. He is a natural leader, but his downfall is his dependability and poor aim. He depends on his two other assistants and will need them with him to prove a point.

So, Theseus lets Curtis fall to the floor and aims for the other two boys. A quick punch to their jaws and he twists their arms. They are strong, he has seen them fight. But this is not a battle they are willing to fight for, and they stumble away and out of the room.

Curtis groans, getting up from the floor. “How does it feel, to know you will waste your life away here?”

“So will you,” Theseus replies plainly, watching him stand up again.

“I will die here,” Curtis glares. “You won’t, until long after than us.”

Theseus stares.

“So don’t think you’re better than any of us,” Curtis spits. “Because you’re worse.”

A voice comes from the shadows. A man with a white mask. Curtis flinches, but Theseus stays still.

It is Dream, who pulls off his mask. “One, Sixteen. You should be in the dining hall.” The mask in his grip makes him appear more daunting because all the students know of the Graduate who kills with no hesitation.

“I apologize,” Curtis stands up straight, and his voice is no longer hard. “Theseus started a fight.”

There is no loyalty between the boys. They were meant to be brothers, but they are also rivals. Curtis knows Dream is deadly and emotionless. He knows he must lie, to avoid the consequences. To throw Theseus under the bus, he saves himself.

“Very well,” Dream states. “You’re dismissed, One.”

Curtis leaves and does not look back.

Dream strides over to Theseus. Any other student will be forced to not cower under his sharp gaze and intimidating presence.

“What happened?” Dream asks, first.

Theseus is monotone. He turns away from Dream, to finish his task of cleaning the mats. But Dream holds his shoulder and forces him to look at him. “He and his friends started a fight; you know I don’t start shit.”

“I know,” Because Dream does. “What did they initiate it over?”

Theseus hesitates. “Nothing, really.”

“Are you lying?”

Theseus smirks. “Yes.”

“You’re an idiot.” Dream rolls his eyes. He assists the boy clean up the hall and forces him to go to the dining room, so he won’t miss a meal.

“You had a mission?” Theseus questions the older boy before he is forced to leave. He points at his mask, which is only used when he does.

“Yeah, I did. Nothing special, I went with George.” They are considered partners during missions. They complete kills together because The Academy knows they will get the job done. It isn’t as if they won’t alone, but they are utilized together to ensure the mission finishes swiftly. “I’ll speak to you later.”

“Okay.” The lonely dining room is not Theseus’ favorite place to sit. He sits alone and he eats alone. The other students will speak to one another and glance at him. He is not an outcast, but he refuses to hold a connection with people who he will not be able to trust.

“See you, Theseus.” Dream refers to him as there are no Teachers alone. “Stay out of trouble.”

“You know that I do.”

“I don’t know, Theseus,” Sapnap says, after hearing Theseus’ story. He is forced by Dream to tell them why One had pulled him aside and they had gotten into a fight. “Maybe you should speak to some of them.”

“What?” Theseus lifts his head from the mat he lies on. It is leisure, which is a period of the day which cannot be held to grant. The Graduates assist the class with techniques, or students go to classrooms for study. *Freedom*, is a sweet taste that can be taken from them at any given moment. “What the fuck, Sapnap?”

“Maybe he’s right?” George shrugs. He throws knives at the wall and goes back to retrieve them. They all hit the bullseye. “They will all turn against you at some point, if that kid – One and his friends, have already.”

“Don’t trust them. But speak to them,” Sapnap tells him. “We know you sit alone during meals like the loser you are. It’s not bad to have allies.”

“I’m not a loser, you prick,” Theseus is seconds away from tackling him. “What if I don’t want to speak to them?”

“Then no one will side with you, if something happens,” Sapnap says, before calling. “A boy in my class, he’d speak to no one and stepped out of line a few times. He was sent away after everyone turned on him because no one liked him.”

George collapses on the map next to Theseus and stretches his arms above his head. “We can keep an eye out on them, but what if One had a knife on him?”

“I have a knife on *me*,” Theseus says plainly. “He has no advantage.”

Sapnap punches his shoulder. “Stop acting like Dream for a second and listen.”

Theseus does not. He pushes Sapnap over, their shoulders colliding as they wrestle. Sapnap laughs as Theseus attempts to pin him down.

“Why must you act like children?” Dream reenters the room, his face laced with mock disappointment. He sits next to George, while Theseus and Sapnap continue. They don’t stop until the younger boy taps out because he has never won to Sapnap.

“Finished?” George questions.

“Shut up, *Loverboy*,” Sapnap comebacks, and Theseus snorts because they will both throw insults at each other, yet Sapnap’s will always reign victorious and simply better. “Now, Dream, please explain to Theseus why he should at least talk to his classmates.”

Dream frowns, glancing at George. “Hm?”

“He’ll need someone to back him up. He doesn’t have to rely upon or trust them, but it’s always good to have a person like that with you,” Sapnap explains. “I made friends with George, and he saved me from various situations.”

“It’s okay to have allies,” Dream shrugs his shoulders, and his eyes do not leave Theseus. The younger boy will always listen to Sapnap and George, but it will be Dream’s words that he follows. “I wouldn’t be against it.”

“I already have you guys,” Theseus shrugs. “That’s enough.” He shoves away Sapnap when he makes an annoying ‘*awww*’ sound with his voice and rolls his eyes when George makes fun of him.

“There’s nothing wrong with speaking to them,” Dream tells him. “And you may have us, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have others. Some of them will survive with you, and you’ll be competing missions with them soon enough. You want them to trust you enough, even if you don’t trust them.”

“Tommy?”

Tommy blinks.

“Tommy!” And Tommy snaps out of his daydream. “Dude, I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Tommy blinks, adjusting his eyes to the sunlight. Standing in front of him is Tubbo, his hands holding tightly to the handlebars as if he’s scared the bike will roll away without his firm hold. To be honest, Tubbo is small and the thing looks like it could topple him over.

“Hey Tubbo,” Tommy rubs his eyes. “What are you doing here?” He isn’t expecting to see the boy.

“Niki made me go run some errands,” Tubbo explains. “Went to buy bread and shit. What are you doing?”

“Well,” Tommy hesitates. “I was eating...” His eyes roam his discarded paper bag and breadcrumbs on the table. “Yeah.”

“Oh,” Tubbo says oddly. “Well, do you want to hang out? I know it’s getting late and you don’t have to say yes, but we can chill at mine if you like.”

Tommy is ready to say no. He’s tired, he might lay on the couch and watch hours of meaningless TV. But he remembers Dream’s words of the past.

“There’s nothing wrong with speaking to them. You may have us, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have others.”

So, Tommy, unexpected to Tubbo (and even himself), says yes.

Tubbo holds his bike as they walk through the park, to his house. It’s far, he says, but they’ll arrive before the sunset.

“Are you sure your parents are fine with it, big man?” Tubbo asks, unsure. He is still surprised Tommy agreed to the whole ordeal.

Tommy rips the bandage off quickly. “Tubs, I don’t have parents.”

“Oh,” he momentarily stops walking, but Tommy continues, and he quickens his pace to match steps with him. “How about your brother?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. “Yeah, he’ll be okay with it.”

“Okay then.”

“Look,” he takes out his phone and shakes it. “I got one of these things. He’ll know.” No, he really won’t, because Tommy won’t tell him. Dream should be focused on whatever he’s doing in Chicago, instead of him.

“You got a phone?” Tubbo exclaims. “And you didn’t tell me?”

“Well—” Words do not leave his lips, because Tubbo snatches his phone to enter his contact. He marvels at the flip phone, although it’s nothing to be jealous of because it’s old and cheap. Tommy’s still grateful for it, though.

After Tubbo enters it, he speaks about his day. “We played soccer again today, you should have come. At least I can text you next time – oh yeah, I got three goals. I’m getting better, I hope, I’m still better than Fundy.”

Tommy nods his head, yawning into his mouth.

“Do you not sleep, at all?” Tubbo questions. “You look exhausted, man.”

“Can’t really sleep,” he does not elaborate.

“Oh,” Tubbo bites his top lip. “Oh.”

“I’ll be fine. Just a little dizzy from walking much, but I’ll be fine.” I always am, he does not say.

“No,” Tubbo refuses. “My house is too far; you’ll pass out beforehand. And I don’t think I’d be able to carry you and the bike at the same time, big man.”

Tommy sighs. One downside of no one knowing his past is that they will continuously underestimate him. He’s survived on no sleep before and been forced to be awake for days. He’d be acting as he did at ten, if he is complaining about being tired on a simple walk back to Tubbo’s.

But Tubbo refuses to let him walk. “I’ll call Wilbur.”

“Why the fuck would you call Wilbur of all people?” Tommy groans.

“So, he can drive us home. Niki’s car is at a garage, getting fixed.”

Tommy does not want to see or speak to Wilbur. But the phone is already by Tubbo's ear and Tommy's arms are limp by his side.

"Hey Wilbur, could you please pick Tommy and me up? Yeah, we're alright.... No, no, shut the fuck up, I don't care you're busy... *No*, I can't just walk home! He's going to combust from sleep deprivation...." Tommy glares at him for being dramatic. "Please come quick, he looks like he's plotting my murder. Yes, thank you!" Tubbo lowers the phone and sends him an innocent smile. "He's coming to pick us up."

"I gathered." The two boys sit on a grassy field, waiting for Wilbur to arrive. Tubbo's bike leans beside them awkwardly, and Tommy stares at it.

"I got it for my thirteenth birthday," Tubbo smiles proudly. "It's my most prized possession. Wilbur's dad got it for me."

Tommy nods his head slowly. "Cool." He's not so good at small talk, or any talk with anyone he doesn't know well, really. Does he know Tubbo well? He's unsure.

They stay in silence, admiring the soft patterns of the sky and sound of the world. Tommy is taught young, to appreciate and show gratitude. Never take anything for granted. Whether that was leisure time, a bed to sleep in, or his life. So he does not mind appreciating their surroundings, with the presence of Tubbo. It's quite nice.

Tommy is exhausted. He has an ongoing battle with his eyes to stay away. He was his shields and swords up and will not succumb to their persistence. Tommy does not want to see the faces of his past. He does not want to deal with that right now.

"You, okay?" Tubbo asks.

"Yeah." Is Tommy's reply.

Tubbo doesn't say anything. The next time he speaks, Wilbur has arrived to pick them up.

They walk to his car slowly, although it's just Tubbo matching Tommy's slow pace. He puts the bike in the boot of Wilbur's car, and the two of them hop in. Tubbo sits at the front, while Tommy resides in the backseat.

"Hey, you two," But Will's eyes stay on Tommy through the mirror. "Are you okay, Tommy?"

"Alright," he nods his head stiffly and stares out of the window.

Wilbur sighs. "Tommy, you look sick. Maybe it's best you go home and sleep."

"What are you, my father?" Tommy mutters. "I'm fine, Will."

"Is your brother home?" Wilbur tests his words carefully as if he's worried Tommy will leave the car because of the number of questions that are projected in his direction. "He'll agree with me."

"He's not home."

Tubbo turns around too, an eyebrow raised. "I thought you said he was."

"I didn't." Maybe he did. His head is drowsy, and he can't think straight. Tommy doesn't like not being at his prime and thinks that going home may be the best situation. He will feel unsafe if he has to depend on others in this state. "He's on a business trip."

“Yeah, I’ll take you to Tubbo’s then,” Wilbur announces, reversing from the parking spot.

“Why?” Tommy asks. As much as he hates to admit it, Wilbur is right. He should go home. Although he would prefer not to.

“You shouldn’t have to be alone,” Wilbur says softly, and that’s that.

Wilbur drops Tommy and Tubbo and Niki’s house. He enters after them, watching the boys rush to Tubbo’s room. His eyes linger on Tommy carefully, before he looks away, searching for Niki.

She’s in the kitchen, papers scattered across the bench. She is usually in this predicament, due to her passion for baking and creating new recipes to introduce to her shop. Wilbur admires her, and the effort she pushes into her work.

“Tommy’s here,” Wilbur tells her.

“Yeah, Tubbo texted me,” Niki’s eyes don’t leave the dough she needs with her palms. “Is the kid okay?”

“I’m not sure. Apparently, his brother is out of town for a business trip, and he’s home alone.” Wilbur says in disbelief. “He’s ready to pass out. Surprised he hasn’t already.”

Niki looks up and furrows her eyebrows. Her blonde hair falls in front of her face and Wilbur laughs lightly at the flour on her cheeks. “Can you tell him that he can stay the night? I would but—” She raises her doughy hands and Wilbur chuckles, nodding his head. “Oh, and one more thing – please tell Phil to talk to me first before allowing Tubbo to hack into another government. I’d like to know if I’m going to get some unexpected phone calls soon.”

“Not the government,” Wilbur shakes his head. “*Nevadas*.”

“Oh,” Niki pulls a packet of chocolate open. “Anything new, then?”

“Well,” Wilbur leans on a wall opposite her. “Tubbo’s helped with everything he can do, but we haven’t found anything we haven’t already known.”

“Haven’t you guys been on this case for months?” Niki’s words aren’t condescending, rather thoughtful and curious.

“We have,” Wilbur sighs, pulling his hair back before it bounces in front of his eyes again. “Phil’s in Chicago right now, talking to them. I think he’s preparing a couple deals with them – but you know how they are. They’ll gain our trust and stab us in our backs.”

“If you need my help, then you can ask, Will,” Niki assures. “Tubbo had to pick up his skills from someone.”

“Thank you,” he says sincerely and means it. “I should check up on the children, then.”

“Go,” she laughs lightly.

Wilbur turns around, his mind a mess from work, but he’ll get over it soon. Soon comes, when he hears an argument burst from Tubbo’s room, and he soon forgets the stress that he’s been holding onto for so long.

Wilbur doesn’t knock on the door and barges in. “Hello?” He notices how Tubbo stands in front of the TV in his room, while Tommy lays lazily in a beanbag. “Is everything alright, in here?” he leans on the doorframe.

“Just go to sleep, Tommy. You’re exhausted.”

“I’m good here,”

“Niki said you can stay here and sleep the night.” Wilbur nods his head in the boy’s direction.

“I don’t want to intrude.”

“You don’t have to,” Wilbur glances at Tubbo. “Are the sheets in the spare room?” Tommy deserves to sleep in a bed tonight, even if he wants to sleep on a sleeping bag in Tubbo’s room. Tommy deserves some sleep.

Tubbo leaves to ready Tommy’s room for the night. The blue-eyed boy frowns.

Wilbur smirks, collapsing on a beanbag next to him.

“Move,” Tommy grits his teeth. “You’ll break the bag and I’m not paying Tubbo for new ones.”

“I won’t,” Wilbur leans back, resting the back of his head on his palms. “Why haven’t you been sleeping?”

“Just can’t.”

“Insomnia?” He has that too.

“No, bad dreams.”

Wilbur drops his hands by his side. Up close, there are heavy bags under the boy’s eyes and his eyelids lower.

“We’ll be here, Tommy. You shouldn’t worry.”

“I like to sleep alone,” Tommy mutters. “In an empty room.”

Wilbur’s lips press against each other thoughtfully. “Okay, that’s okay.”

“I am really tired, Wilbur,” Tommy groans. “I just don’t want to sleep. I can’t.”

“You’re sleep-deprived, Toms,” And for some reason, Wilbur finds himself caring a lot more than he should for a boy he hasn’t known for so long. He doesn’t trust too easily, which says something. “If you do have bad dreams, or can’t go to sleep, I’ll be in the living room with Niki. We can watch a movie or something.”

“Really?” And he sounds so tired.

“Really,” Wilbur confirms. “I promise.”

Tommy finally goes to sleep in the spare bedroom, after Tubbo returns. Wilbur notices how he locks the door but does not say anything of it.

“Is he okay?” Tubbo asks him.

“He will be. I hope.” Wilbur is worried for this kid. He has a lot of shit to worry about nowadays. Firstly, *Las Nevadas*, *Quackity*, and a case he’s been working on for months. On top of that, he has his older brother and father to concern about – and now this mysterious kid who’s entered their lives.

Sometimes, he forgets to breathe in between the chaos.

Wilbur exhales.

Chapter End Notes

hiiii guys! a bit of delay, because of an unexpected christmas trip.
hope everyone has had a good weekend :) leave comments and kudos if you can (they help me update faster :D)

next update by saturday i hope lol

Backstory

Chapter Summary

“Tommy!” Tubbo yells from the couch. “Watch a movie with me. You owe me one after being asleep for the whole day.”

“Tubbo,” Niki scolds.

“I know,” Tubbo states quickly. “But Wilbur is shit company, he’s my only option during boredom.”

“I think the correct term for that is boredom,” Wilbur corrects.

“See what I mean!” Tubbo exclaims dramatically.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy is not in his bedroom when he wakes up.

There is an unfamiliar clock hanging on the opposite wall and he lays on sheets that he is not used to. Expectedly, the time is six exactly. He remembers where he is after he regains his senses. He is asleep in Tubbo’s bedroom after Wilbur and Tubbo had realized he hadn’t had a wink of sleep.

Wilbur. Tommy isn’t vulnerable around many people. He is an assassin, he should be. Vulnerability is weakness, which would have gotten him killed at The Academy. He recalls telling Will that he doesn’t like falling asleep with other people present (he physically can’t because of the way he was for years), but Tommy doesn’t know if that’s something he can use against him.

(“Do not reveal your weaknesses,” the Teachers demand. “Do not share any part of yourself.”

They end up tearing the students apart until they are stripped of fears and themselves. Soon, they are no one but numbers who do not have a purpose but to kill. Taught to be emotionless, and replaceable, there is no part of themselves that they can display to the outside world.)

Maybe Wilbur isn’t here, Tommy thinks to himself. He has probably gone home already.

He is anything but true. Wilbur is seated in the dining room, accompanied by Niki on his left. Tubbo lounges by the TV, a bowl of popcorn on his stomach. Tommy takes a moment to survey the surroundings. His eyes pinpoint the doors to lead to the backyard and a possible escape route. It’s a necessity, a procedure drilled into his bones.

“Tommy!” Niki notices Tommy. “Glad to see you awake.”

He nods his head and looks anywhere but Wilbur’s eyes. “I think I’ll go home now—”

“Don’t be silly,” she refuses. “You haven’t eaten all day. Sit down so I can cook you something.”

Tommy stands in silence. “It’s only six?”

Tubbo snorts from the couch. “Six in the afternoon, big man. You’ve been asleep all day.”

Tommy blinks once. Then twice. He hasn’t gotten so much sleep before. Niki ushers him to sit down, unfortunately right beside Wilbur, whose calculating eyes do not leave him for a second. Tommy has always had a sharp gaze, but his mind is still hazy and adjusting, so he cannot match Wilbur.

“You okay?” the man asks quietly.

“Yeah,” Tommy coughs into his fist. “I’m not used to... so much sleep.”

“Well, I’m glad you got it, you needed it,” Wilbur smiles and Tommy misses his annoying presence, replaced by a careful and excessive worrying demeanor. He reminds the boy of Dream for a second.

“Tommy!” Tubbo yells from the couch. “Watch a movie with me. You owe me one after being asleep for the whole day.”

“Tubbo,” Niki scolds.

“I know,” Tubbo states quickly. “But Wilbur is shit company, he’s my only option during boredom.”

“I think the correct term for that is *boredom*,” Wilbur corrects.

“See what I mean!” Tubbo exclaims dramatically. While Wilbur and Tubbo continue arguing, Niki sets down a plate in front of Tommy. Consisting of a small portion of noodles, vegetables, and chicken, Tommy feels hungry staring at it.

“Thanks, Niki,” Tommy thanks softly.

“Do you want to spend the night again?” She questions.

“I should really go home.” The home shouldn’t be unprotected for so long. And Tommy doesn’t want to interfere more than he has. He’s already spent a whole day at theirs, they won’t want him around for so long.

Then, the daunting realization comes to the boy.

“Fuck,” he swears, and Niki watches him, worried. “I missed my shift, today. I’m sorry – fuck.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” Niki reiterates. “Tubbo helped me out today. You deserve the sleep, Tommy.”

They keep telling him that he’s deserving of things. First Wilbur, and now her. Tommy disagrees – he does not deserve anything. He does not deserve life when he has introduced death to so many.

“Tommy?” Wilbur interrupts his train of thought. “Eat.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mutters but still shovels a forkful of chicken into his mouth. Between bites, he adds, “Bitch.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes. “You are a child.”

“No you, prick.”

“I’m twenty-five!”

“Okay?” Tommy shrugs slowly. Wilbur groans, but he doesn’t leave his company, so it’s his fault if insults and food come flying his way because he doesn’t sit elsewhere. Tommy would not waste Niki’s food though, it’s all Wilbur’s fault if anything happens.

He was taught manners at the early age of ten. Chin high, back straight, no elbows on the table. It doesn’t mean he has to follow those rules around the man.

They join Tubbo for a movie after Tommy has eaten, as much as he asks for them to start without him. Niki brings another bowl of caramel popcorn, and Tubbo and Tommy stuff their faces. Wilbur sits by Niki on the other couch, his eyes flickering between the boys and the TV. Tommy knows the real reason why Wilbur keeps looking at him; he’s suspicious. He wants to know why Tommy is so odd and figure out the mystery behind him.

Too bad Tommy is a trained assassin and won’t give him a thing to work with.

The movie that Tubbo puts on is a crime film, which has Tommy laying back and observing the screen carefully. It is based on the life of a murderer, and his childhood leading up to his adulthood, when he commits his first kills.

Tommy is silent the whole time while Wilbur and Tubbo talk from time to time. At The Academy, films like these would be used to pinpoint all the mistakes as one day, the following students would complete tasks of their own.

(“Sixteen?” A Teacher questions him from the front of the classroom. Theseus sits up.

“His overestimation and carelessness.”

“Elaborate,” They demand.

“He believes that his target will not fight back, which results in his DNA left behind. And due to his carelessness, surrounding security cameras will be able to determine his similar located murders. He was concentrating on concealing his identity, therefore did not anticipate this.”

“Correct,” The Teacher says and turns away.)

Tommy wants to laugh through the movie and holds himself back. The mistakes are so clear, that he could go on about them if asked by a Teacher.

By the time the credits roll though, Wilbur and Tubbo are grinning. “That was sick,” Wilbur is impressed. “We have to watch the sequel, now.”

“What did you think, Tommy?” Tubbo turns to him.

He shrugs. “It was okay.”

“Just, okay?” Tubbo smirks. “Your standards are high.”

He wants to tell the boy that the murderer’s motives aren’t clear throughout the movie, and for someone who had researched for the perfect murder since an early age, they had completed many mistakes.

Instead, he says, “I think I’ll have to watch the sequel. Left on quite a cliffhanger.”

Niki shrugs her shoulders. “It’s only eight. We can do that.”

Tubbo grabs the remote and turns on the movie. Tommy is watching and calculating. He looks out

for mistakes and pinpoints the lack of logic.

At some point, his shoulders unhunch and he stops counting the mistakes with his mind. No one will ask him questions, and he will not go to bed hungry if he can't answer a question about it. So instead, he allows himself to relax.

Theseus and George go on their first mission together. They are usually assisted by Dream, however, today is their first time without him.

"Ready?" George questions as they wait for their transportation, their bags packed and their heads high. Theseus must contain his excitement; he will not let it show.

"I am," Theseus nods his head. "A shame you couldn't do this with Dream."

"I don't mind," George rolls his eyes at Theseus' implication. "Today, I'll see if you'll live up to being our fourth."

At his words, Theseus stands up straighter and conceals any emotion. Today, he must complete a mission but prove something to his elder. He must prove that he is worthy.

Their transportation arrives. They revise their background silently. George will sneak into a bar and drug a man's drink. His name is Bailey Adams, and he is twenty-six. He is built, and six feet tall. He is not a match for George.

George will bring him outside. They will kill him and bring his body to a hotel, where they will frame his murder on another man. Calvin Davis. A rich man in his forties. It is not explicitly stated in his files, how rich he is. Theseus guesses that he is a millionaire.

George reads his thoughts. "The third party is paying six figures. He's important. Not famous, but important."

The hits placed are done for a large sum of money. If they aren't, then The Academy wants to have fun. They want their marks remembered; their names to be known. They want to display fear and their students to be known as the best in the world.

The mission goes ahead. Theseus lurks outside the bar with an empty suitcase in one hand, a cigarette in another. He must appear older, although he hates the taste. They are taught to blend into the scene, and Theseus does exactly that.

George will not take long. He will introduce himself to Bailey and carefully slide a packet of powder into his drink. He will then ensure it has dissolved, before sliding it to him.

"What's the suitcase, for?" A drunk man passes Theseus.

Theseus shrugs his shoulders and smirks. "Going on holiday."

The drunk man laughs and stumbles. "Where to?"

"Sacramento," Is the first place that enters his mind. "California."

The man staggers away. He will forget Theseus' presence in the morning. If he was not intoxicated, he would have had to kill him. He makes no mistakes and leaves no witnesses.

George comes back, a tall man leaning against his shoulder, his head tipped back. He looks asleep.

Soon, he isn't. Soon, he is dead.

At the dead of the night, the two assassins place the man in the suitcase and bring him to the hotel. They dispose of his body at Calvin's hotel room and rearrange the room to create evidence. George is more trained so he moves around the room swiftly, his gloved hands carefully placing weapons and stains around the room. All while Theseus hovers by the man, flicking his knife out.

An 'A' cut into his palm. The police are unaware of their existence, but other agencies will find about this kill. They will discover the murder and hire agents, from The Academy to complete their missions.

The Academy will grow stronger. They will rise to the fall. The Academy must be the best because it's how they train their students. The Academy will grow until they are unstoppable.

Tommy is forced to spend the day with Wilbur.

He's at Niki and Tubbo's house more often, after they find out that Dream will not return for another six days. They offer for him to sleep there, but Tommy denies.

Tommy spends a lot of time with Tubbo, playing video games and sports in their backyard. He wins every round. (Tubbo is confused after Tommy reveals that he's never played many video games in his lifetime. He accuses him of cheating.) Other times, they spend time at Niki's bakery, doing shifts together. Tommy suspects Niki has told him to keep him company, but he later realizes that Tubbo's a clingy little shit and stays with him willingly.

The only person he does not get along well with is Wilbur. So Niki forces them to spend a day together.

("For the sake of my bakery," she sighs. "You will guys will be scaring the customers off at this rate.

Like they don't already, Tommy thinks but agrees.)

Wilbur keeps glancing at Tommy. He thinks he doesn't notice, but his eyes will stay on him for a second too long, before looking away, moments later glancing back.

Tommy blatantly ignores him, focusing on the text message Dream has sent him. He thinks of a

response to: *How are you? Will be back in four days.*

“What are you doing?” Wilbur nudges, before adding. “You got a phone now?”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mutters. He responds quickly, something along the lines of *I’m fine. See you then.* His fingers fumble across the small keyboard, his hands numb from the winds. He presses send and stuffs his phone away.

Wilbur keeps staring at him. Tommy is apprehensive when he side-eyes him, but he knows Wilbur isn’t deadly and practically harmless. Tommy can take him down in a second, with his eyes closed.

Although, he is taught to never underestimate anyone. Wilbur can be an exception.

“Are you okay?”

Tommy whips his head at the older, who’s stops walking as he does. “What? Why?”

“That isn’t an answer,” Wilbur laughs lightly, the air fogging up at his breaths.

“Why are you asking?” Tommy doesn’t continue walking even though Wilbur seems as though he wants to.

“Tommy,” Wilbur responds lightly. “I’m just asking – I care.”

Tommy scoffs and starts walking down the footpath again. Wilbur shouts a ‘hey!’, startled, before he catches up to the boy again. Tommy attempts to ignore him, wishing that he could just go home to his apartment and wait until Dream comes back. But he knows he shouldn’t be alone; he *definitely* shouldn’t be alone with his mind.

“You should not care,” Tommy snaps at him.

“Well, you should have someone,” Wilbur reasons, stumbling over his words at the younger boy’s harshness.

“I have Dream,” Tommy says curtly.

“Do you?” Wilbur questions. “Because he left you alone for a week, Tommy. He shouldn’t do that.”

“Shut the *fuck* up, Wilbur,” Tommy scowls. “You don’t know shit, so don’t pretend you do.”

Wilbur sighs. “Sorry, sorry.” Tommy looks away, forcing himself to ignore the words that now circulate his mind. He won’t let it get to him like he’s been trained to. “Let’s go to the park, we can talk there.”

“No,” Tommy denies. “I’m going home, I know you don’t want to be here either.”

“Tomm–”

But Tommy is off, jogging away so that he doesn’t have to see Wilbur’s stupid face and his stupid fake glasses and hear his stupid voice and questions. He takes only four steps forward when an arm tugs him back.

Tommy’s instincts kick in. His body turns, and so does his hand, ready to twist the arm around and secure it behind his back.

Before he does, he registers it is Wilbur. Not a threat. So, he grips onto his hand tightly, glaring at the man.

“Don’t fucking touch me.” And he lets go.

Wilbur blinks twice, startled again. He probably regrets ever meeting him now. Tommy won’t blame him. “Okay, okay,” He pulls his hands in the air, in surrender. “We’ll go to the park. I know you want to go to your apartment, but I don’t want to go back to an unhappy-Niki. For both our sakes, we should talk,”

Tommy’s lips thin and his face remains blank, his voice monotone. “Okay.”

They go to the park. Wilbur can navigate himself pretty well here since he’s lived in the exact town since he was a child and Tommy memorizes the road names and locations quickly. He routes a map into his mind and keeps it stored safely. George taught him a trick when he was younger.

The park they sit at is the same one Tommy went to with Dream. They sit at the same bench, and Tommy can almost vision his brother sitting by him.

“Hey,” A shadow looms in his mind, not of a face he’s killed for once. Then, it disappears.

“My brother and I used to come here a lot,” Wilbur says to divert the tension. “We’d climb trees and all that kid shit.”

“You have a brother?” But Tommy isn’t even slightly interested.

“Yeah, he’s older than me,” Wilbur says. “By three minutes.”

Tommy doesn’t know much about him, he realizes. He probably should, in case he needs to for the future. So, he asks more questions.

“What’s his name?”

“Techno.”

Tommy snorts. “Shit name. Runs in the family.”

“Hey!” Wilbur shouts, but it’s in a joking tone. “My father’s name is Phil.”

“He’s a shit namer,” Tommy mutters. His name is Theseus. Named after a hero who killed the Minotaur. His name is pretty shit too.

“Don’t disrespect Phil like that,” Wilbur nudges his shoulder, his eyes lightly glaring at the boy. He has to lean his head down because he’s so tall and Tommy has a stupid slouch. Tommy doesn’t bother correcting it, as The Academy would do.

(They sit at the table, Tommy’s back straight and his eyes on the food Dream has laid in front of him. He’s meant to eat when he is told to.

Dream comes back, a fork in his hand as he hums under his breath. “What are you waiting for? Eat, Tommy.”

Tommy eats.

Dream then realizes he was waiting for permission. At The Academy, they’d have to wait until they could. Usually, a Teacher would give them permission. “Tommy, you don’t have to wait for

anyone, anymore.”

“What?” He doesn’t look up from his food.

Dream makes him, tugging his face upwards. “We’re not there anymore. You don’t have to wait for me to start eating, and you don’t have to sit straight or any of that shit. We’re free.”)

“What’s the story behind your brother’s name?”

Tommy doesn’t tell him. Dream’s real name isn’t Dream. He’s called that because he was the dream of the Headmaster. Dream is admired and everyone strives to be like him. Sapnap comes up with the nickname, and it sticks.

“Just a name, innit?” Tommy shrugs his shoulders. “Not everything needs a backstory.”

“What about your backstory?” And now Wilbur’s asking for too much from him. Like he hasn’t before.

“I’m not telling you, shit.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur sighs. “We should get to know each other. You’ll be stuck with me for a while.”

Not if Tommy can help it. They’ll free Sapnap and George with Dream and they won’t ever see this stupid town again. They’ll drive away and find a better place to stay. They’ll be free together.

“I’ll go first,” Wilbur suggests. “I live with my brother and father, and we’ve lived here since I was born. I studied Criminology at college before I dropped out. I have a dog and read in my spare time.”

“That’s a shit backstory,” Tommy responds, rolling his eyes. “Why’d you drop out?”

Wilbur shrugs his shoulders. “Too much work, I guess. I work for my father, now, though.”

“Oh, what does he do?”

Wilbur falters. *Bullseye*, Tommy thinks. “He runs a small company. A security-camera business. I used to work at Niki’s too until you stole my job.”

“How the fuck?” Tommy shouts. “You don’t know how to use a coffee machine without breaking it! Thank god, I took your job, otherwise, Niki wouldn’t have coffee to sell.”

“Shut up, child,” Wilbur flicks his forehead. “I brought in the customers. You scare them away.”

“Now, that’s a lie. I have my amazing looks and wonderful personality; you have nothing on you.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes and nudges him. “Your turn.”

Tommy sighs. He glares at the sun, threatening to set on the horizon. He thinks of a story to tell.

“I used to live in the country with Dream before we moved here,” he says very carefully.

“What about your parents?” Wilbur asks softly.

“Out of the picture. I don’t remember them well.” Which is the truth. Tommy will never be able to remember his parents. The Academy forced the memories out of their students. “Dream raised me.”

“Oh,” Something settles in Wilbur’s eyes. Tommy watches the emotion carefully, yet to decipher it. “I don’t remember my mother well either.”

“Oh,” Tommy bites the inside of his cheek. “Sorry.” He’s not used to showing sympathy. Usually, when he finds out about death, he’s meant to ignore it and reveal no emotion.

“She’s not dead. Out of the picture too. I also – I also had a younger brother.”

Tommy is silent as Wilbur speaks.

“He was taken from a young age,” Wilbur says lightly, and slowly. Remembering a memory, hard to remember. “It’s fine though. It happened years ago.”

“Sorry,” Tommy apologizes again because he doesn’t know what to do. “I also, well, I also have two other brothers.”

He swears at himself for the information he’s given. For the vulnerability that he’s passed around, which he should know very well against.

“Oh,” Wilbur says. “I haven’t heard you mention them before.”

“I haven’t. They’re not around anymore. But – but they will be, soon. It’s just Dream and I for now.”

Tommy doesn't know if he's thinking of Sapnap and George, or the two figures that he distinguished as his brothers, from a memory a while ago.

“Maybe we have more in common than we thought,” Wilbur smiles. “Truce, Thomas?”

“That isn’t my name, bitch.” Tommy groans but he ends up agreeing with the man. “I guess we do. But no fucking truces, you’re still a wrong’en.”

“What the fuck, man?”

“Your name is *Wilbur*,” Tommy says the name like its venom. They both stand up, and Wilbur volunteers to walk him back to his apartment. “Of course, you’re one.”

“The–*Tommy*,” Dream is still getting used to his new name. “You have to eat.”

“I’m not hungry,” Tommy lays on the couch, his arm and legs sprawled out, his fingertips grazing the carpet.

“You’re eating,” Dream demands, standing by the small table in the hotel they’re staying at. They will leave tomorrow morning. “Come sit with me.” It’s a small room, the kitchen and living room connected together. They share a room and there is a tiny bathroom connected to it. Tommy is used to small spaces, but he wants his personal area for once.

"I'm not hungry," Tommy repeats, his voice hollow. "I'll throw it up."

He hopes Dream will leave him alone. His eyelids flicker closed. When they open, Dream stands by the couch, his face over his. Any other person would be startled by the sudden presence, but he only closes his eyes again. "Get lost, prick."

"You know I can't do that," Dream frowns. "You need energy, Toms. You haven't eaten all day."

"And?" Tommy sighs. "So what?"

"We have a long day tomorrow. I need you to pull up against your own in case something happens."

"Who cares?" Tommy yawns. "Who cares anymore?"

Dream grabs his shoulders and pushes him up. Tommy almost flinches but Dream doesn't let go. Tommy knows that Dream is hesitant with the sudden contact too. A week ago, they could not touch. Dream could not ruffle his hair or hug him. Touch is hesitant, because of the looming worry that a Teacher will catch them – or someone will stop them, and they will both be punished.

"Listen," Dream stresses. "And listen closely."

Tommy listens.

"We left to be free. Because if we didn't, you'd graduate and be committed to killing and missions for the rest of your life. We would both be trapped, Tommy, and there wasn't going to be a possible way to escape. It would slowly destroy us, kill by kill, until we were nothing but assassins." Dream exhales and he shakes his shoulders. "We are people, Tommy. You deserve to be a kid, we deserve to be free."

"Dream–"

"Don't tell me you're not going to try. And don't tell me you won't care because you will. And I'll make sure of it – you will live Tommy. You're going to be a normal sixteen-year-old kid or so help me god."

"It's my fault," Tommy mutters. "That Sapnap and George didn't make it out." He didn't follow their plans; he had made a mistake. Assassins do not make mistakes. Students of The Academy cannot afford so.

"We'll get them out," Dream promises. "Until then, promise me you will be free with me."

"What?" Tommy doesn't understand his words.

"You won't die. I won't let you; I won't let you not try or care because we can finally live freely."

"Okay," Tommy sighs numbly. "Okay."

Wilbur leaves and Tommy is alone again.

He lays on the couch, and his memories relive through his mind. Dream tells him to care, in their past. The nights following their escape, he'd repeated to Tommy again and again that he deserves to live like this. He deserves friends like Tubbo and to be a kid even if he couldn't.

Tommy does not like being alone. He grew up with twenty-nine other students. He had Dream, Sapnap, and George. But in times like this, he is truly alone with himself. He remembers his past and the cruel he has committed. He recalls the horror of the past; the horror he has committed.

Tommy misses Dream. He misses George. Tommy misses Sapnap. Because if anyone deserves to be free, then it's them.

"You're a monster," his mind echoes and he is. So is his mind, as it eats up his memories and forces him into the darkest dreams and the nightmare of his past.

On the other side of the country, a boy with fire eyes grows restless. He is not a boy anymore though; he is a man – soon he will be twenty-one.

He tosses around a lighter in his left hand, his eyes caged with flame. His sharp teeth are revealed through his devilish grin, but his eyes are colder than the stone of his heart.

He waits.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the delay! i'm gonna stop saying my estimated update time because i'll never follow it. my update schedule is 1-2 weeks i think

also wanted to say if it wasn't clear yet, that this book is based on fiction and not on the real content creators.

anyways leave kudos and comments if you can! (they help me update faster :D) next update will contain more of wilbur and tommy and maybe some secrets exposed? who knows lol

hope you enjoyed <33

Scars

Chapter Summary

“Tommy?” Techno stands by his chair and stares at the screens in front of them. “The kid you’ve gotten attached to?”

“No,” Wilbur says as Tubbo says, “Yes.”

“Why are you so interested?” Techno scoffs. “There’s nothing about him that you can’t just ask.”

“That’s the thing, Tech, he’s closed off. Really closed off, and I’m worried for him. He and his brother showed up out of nowhere and there’s something going on.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Tubbo,” Wilbur enters the room without knocking. “I need you to find everything you can about Tommy.”

Tubbo turns in his spinning chair, disbelief ridden on his features. “You’re not serious. That’s an invasion of privacy!”

“That’s not what you said to the last hundred people you dug up,” Wilbur collapses on the chair next to him and nods his head, a silent usher for him to start his thing. He’s only seventeen himself, but Tubbo helps Phil and their business out a lot. Wilbur won’t admit it, but the annoying teenager’s skills are quite impressive.

“That’s my job, Wilbur,” Tubbo stretches out his words, very slowly as he thinks of Wilbur’s motives here. “I do that because Phil tells me to and because I get paid.”

“I’m not paying you.”

“And I’m not helping you with this shit,” Tubbo turns on his hair and stares at his computer, where he’s in the middle of a game of Tetris. “Ask Niki or Ranboo. Someone else but me.”

Wilbur sighs and leans back in his chair. “I’m worried about the kid.”

“I’m not surprised,” Tubbo hums.

“You can’t tell me that Tommy confuses you too. I don’t want much, Tubbo. I just want to make sure that Dream’s a good guy and that Tommy’s safe at home.”

Tubbo sighs and pauses his game. “And here I am, thinking I was on break since Phil’s not here. You’re not getting much though, I’m not going to invade his personal life and whole history.”

“Thanks,” Wilbur smiles, patting the boy’s shoulder. Tubbo shakes his hand away and gets to work. Tubbo is good at what he does and an integral part of their assignments. Wilbur finds himself by Phil’s side most of the time, but he’ll find himself returning to the computer lab of their

Headquarters to have a scope of what Tubbo does. His eyes fly through his monitors and his fingers have a mind of their own, as he completes his task.

They don't know much about Tommy, though. They know his first name and age so it will be harder to scope enough information.

"Niki told me his last name is Taken," So they have his last name too. "Don't have much here to work with. Give me a bit."

"Okay, thanks Tubbo," Wilbur lays back in his seat and closes his eyes. He thinks he has a short nap, but he doesn't remember exactly as his eyes fly open one second and Tubbo is still staring at his screen, frowning.

"I can't find him."

"*What?*" Wilbur exclaims and stares at the screen in front.

"Usually, I'd be able to find something. His birth details or his name in graduated students of his year. I can't find him anywhere though. Not a trace."

"The fuck?" Wilbur mumbles.

"I looked through his brother, Dream, too. A unique name, so you'd think that there was something – right? Nothing, nothing at all. No voting applications, no prior registered car or home requests. I can't find a single school with their names clear in their databases."

"What's going on here?" Red eyes and pink braided hair enter the room. He's sweaty, signaling he was at the gym or working out downstairs. But Wilbur doesn't glance at his older brother, Technoblade, because his mind spirals in wonder.

Who is this kid? He thinks. *And where the hell did he come from?*

"Wilbur's forcing me to do his dirty work for him and wanted to find shit about Tommy. I couldn't find a thing."

"Tommy?" Techno stands by his chair and stares at the screens in front of them. "The kid you've gotten attached to?"

"No," Wilbur says as Tubbo says, "Yes."

"Why are you so interested?" Techno scoffs. "There's nothing about him that you can't just ask."

"That's the thing, Tech, he's closed off. Really closed off, and I'm worried for him. He and his brother showed up out of nowhere and there's something going on."

"Wilbur," Techno exhales loudly. "You're overthinking this. You're too attached to this kid and coming up with wrong conclusions."

"Tubbo can't find anything about him, though!"

"And? There are a lot of possible explanations for that. Did you ever conclude that Tommy wasn't born here, or he hasn't been telling you the truth of his name? It isn't that deep."

Wilbur sighs and Tubbo agrees. "I don't feel right about searching him up. It doesn't seem okay."

"Give it a break," Techno demands. "Unless you want Phil to get involved, when he gets back."

“Okay,” Wilbur stands up, brushing the front of his shirt. “Fine.”

Tommy finds himself getting closer to Wilbur over the next couple of days.

Not the trust-type of close. Neither the *I'll-let-you-into-my-apartment* close. But it's getting to the point where Tommy will be on shift and await Wilbur's presence. He's expecting the man to show up, but because he enjoys his company.

Wilbur's glasses are fake, and his face is still ugly. But Tommy doesn't mind hanging out with him. As long as the questions are nonexistent and Wilbur sops delving into his personal life, their conversations won't be tension-filled.

Niki may be pleased that they're getting along too. Although, she is probably reconsidering it because Tommy is the embodiment of chaos and Wilbur is the human version of chaoticness.

“I've watched a few movies,” Tommy responds to Wilbur's query as he places a chocolate muffin and sugar biscuit in a paper bag for a customer.

“Then how have you never heard of *Harry Potter*. Everyone knows Harry fuckin' Potter!”

“I watch crime and mystery,” Tommy deadpans at Wilbur's disbelief. “Harry Potter sounds like a kids' movie. Some shit show about potter.”

Wilbur snorts as slams his mug on the table. “You're unbelievable, kid. I can't believe you haven't heard of it.”

“I watched *Die Hard* the other day,” Tommy reasons. He now regrets telling Tubbo he's watched many movies, thinking that the boy would ignore or forget the piece of information. It turns out, he has told Wilbur.

Tommy has watched many movies, in all honestly. The Teachers never told them the names though. He's watched thousands of crime and murder.

“*Die Hard*?” Wilbur scoffs. “C'mon man, that's a Christmas movie. Strictly forbidden from any month that isn't December.”

Tommy groans. “Nothing will satisfy you.”

“Come over to mine,” Wilbur suggests. “I'll introduce you to the wonderful world of classics. We'll fit the whole Harry Potter series in there sometime,”

“I'm not going to your fucking house,” A customer enters the store and Wilbur leans back, watching Tommy as he musters up a smile and grabs a vanilla and white chocolate muffin for them.

“That, or yours,” Wilbur says when the customer leaves.

“You’re not stepping foot into my fucking apartment.”

“Fine, we’ll go to the movies. You can bring Tubbo along and I’ll bring my brother.”

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. He recalls Wilbur mentioning his older brother with an odd name. He asks, while rearranging the front row of muffins. “Why would we invite him?”

“He’ll kill me if he finds out I’m going without inviting him.”

Tommy doesn’t know if he’s up to it. Dream will be back home the following day, and he should tidy up the apartment beforehand. But he also does not want to be left alone. Tubbo is a clingy shit and Wilbur won’t leave him alone – benefits of ‘befriending’ the two. He does not feel alone with them, and his mind won’t take over.

So, he agrees. Not for Wilbur’s sake, but his own.

Tommy does not think, feel or breathe when Dream slices his leg open with a knife. He waits for the man to pull out a metal chip, placing it down on a paper towel beside him once he’s found it. It’s hard to grip onto it, he has to use extra force with the tweezers to lodge it out from inside his skin.

Blood is everywhere. Nothing they are not used to,

“Almost done,” Dream reassures as he grabs the sterilization kit and begins to clean his needle. Blood is stained to the seats and table. It will be a bitch to clean off. Tommy sits still, his fingers gripping onto his rolled-up pant leg and his mind frozen. He does not feel the needle poking into his skin nor does he hear Dream’s soft breaths as the man finishes the job.

Dream finishes. Now, it’s Tommy’s turn with the needle. Dream pulls up his own pant leg and smiles softly. (He does that a lot nowadays since they’ve left The Academy) “Don’t cut too deep.”

Tommy does not. His slice is swift and steady. He does a good job, having experience from dealing with this situation before. Although Dream can clean up well, Tommy’s hands are still, and his precision is on point.

He finds the metal tracker quickly. Soon, they will drive and deposit them far away for bait. They will then drive and find another apartment to stay in before they leave again. They must run and hide and track the agents that are coming after them. They have already encountered one (Dream had knocked him out), they do not want to meet another.

Tommy finishes his job, and Dream lets out a deep breath he is holding. It doesn’t hurt, this is nothing comparable to the pain they have witnessed, Dream is probably nervous that Tommy will screw up.

“Tommy?” Dream asks as they throw away their bloody clothes and change into comfy sweatpants

and white shirts they have bought from a cheap store. This will be the first time the pair do not wear their uniforms. Tommy feels a breath of fresh air as he buttons up his shirt. “Where did you get this one?” Dream points at a thin line traveling up his arm.

Tommy stares at it in the mirror. They all have their fair share of marks and bruises. Tommy hasn’t noticed this particular one though and squints at how precise and careful the cut is. Nothing he would have received during a mission.

“I don’t know,” Tommy concludes. “We all have our fair share of scars.”

“I saw a similar looking on your legs.” Dream says slowly, testing Tommy’s reaction. The boy stares down at the carpet. “It doesn’t look like it was made on missions. It’s too, how do I put this? Exact.”

Their scars from training are jagged and uneven. Tommy sees what Dream does but does not comment on it as he does.

“It’s nothing, Dream,” Tommy sighs tiredly. “Just another one.”

“Okay then,” Dream replies, uncertainly, and they go to sleep to prepare for tomorrow.

Tommy stares at the scars on his arm. He is reminded of the moment Dream asks him where the particular one came from.

They all have scars, though. He ignores the taunts in his mind and shoves on a black shirt. He rethinks going to the movies with Wilbur, but he can’t back out now. Tommy ends up matching his dark shirt, with black jeans and his red shoes. He leaves his hair as it is, and fiddles with his nose ring as he contemplates leaving the house, and if he’ll end up calling out.

His phone rings. Tubbo calls him. “*You better not be bailing on us, Tommy.*” His voice is static due to Tommy’s phone condition. He had been practicing throwing knives at a target board Dream has bought and had accidentally dropped and stepped on it as he was aiming.

It’s still in a bearable condition. “I’m not,” Tommy responds. “I’d never bail on you, Tubbo. Wilbur Soot on the other hand? Every time.”

He can hear Tubbo’s chuckle and Wilbur shouting at him in the background. “*Hurry up, man. We’re all here.*”

“On my way.” And he ends the call. One last look at himself, and he leaves his room. He grabs Dream’s black jacket laying lazily on the couch, before he leaves, not wanting his arms so exposed. A reason why the cold days are so nice; he won’t be questioned why he wears long sleeves. He’s not ashamed of his scars, Dream flaunts the one on his face almost proudly. He just doesn’t want extra questions – especially from Wilbur.

Tommy knows Wilbur is apprehensive and filled with queries. He sees it in his eyes and hears it in his tone.

The boy leaves the apartment complex promptly, his eyes surveying his surroundings as he crosses the road and enters a shop to grab a soft drink. He sips on it, as he makes his way to the cinema. He will not admit he's never been to one before, and he won't admit he's excited either.

Tommy doesn't want to be late, so he ends up jumping over a wired gate and crossing through a field he probably should not be in. He ducks under a hole on a metal fence and watches the people around him as he does. The cinema is in sight, and he notices a familiar shorter boy, a taller one, and a man with pink hair.

Techno; a man with a weird name and weird hair.

"Tommy!" Wilbur exclaims as the boy approaches, but the boy's eyes are glued to the man he is unfamiliar with, observing him and pinpointing his weaknesses. He's built and tall. But he is no match for Tommy. "I really thought you were going to bail on us."

"I was," Tommy takes a sip of his drink, finally looking away from the pink-haired man. "It was a last-minute decision."

Wilbur smirks and glances at his brother. They exchange glimpses. Tommy is good at hearing, and hears Techno between Tubbo and his conversation, as he mutters to Wilbur, *'You didn't tell me the kid was emo.'*

Tommy rolls his eyes. "I'm not emo, bitch."

Techno blinks, turning away from Wilbur quickly as the boy calls him out. "I wasn't talking to you."

"You were talking about me," Tommy mutters.

"He is right though," Wilbur laughs and points to his dark clothes and piercing. Tommy scowls and drags Tubbo into the cinema with him, to get away from them. Dream used to call Sapnap it all the time, and George would laugh. So, Tommy assumes that it's nothing good.

"What movie are we watching?" Tommy questions his friend as they stand in line after he throws his empty can in the bin. He surveys the room of people slowly, figuring out the location of each exit.

"It's called *Wander*," Tubbo explains, checking his phone. "Seems pretty cool."

"Okay," Tommy nods his head, frowning as Techno and Wilbur enter the waiting line. They stand behind, leaning on the wall as they whisper to each other. His eyes narrow towards them before he looks away.

After Tubbo grabs his tickets, they approach the two other boys. Tommy manages to make out clips of their conversation as they approach. "He'll take a while to warm up to you, don't worry."

"And you're talking about me again," Tommy rolls his eyes at the two. "Tubbo, how the fuck do you put up with them two?"

Tubbo shrugs his shoulders, smiling. "They're tolerable when they buy me shit."

Wilbur rolls his eyes and takes out a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet. "Grab food and drinks.

Meet us there.”

Tubbo nods his head and hands them their tickets. Techno’s eyes stick on Tommy until they leave.

The two boys buy large buckets of buttery popcorn and thick shakes. They marvel at the sight of the food but Tubbo ushers Tommy to hurry up, otherwise, they will miss the starting ads apparently.

“The best part,” Tubbo says with importance. Tommy rolls his eyes but nods along.

“We could eat all this ourselves. Do we need to share it?” Tommy smirks as they enter their cinema room.

“I don’t want Wilbur to throw a fit, so we should,” Tubbo sighs. “Next time, we’ll hide the food for ourselves.”

“Good idea.” Techno and Wilbur are seated by the back, whispering to each other. Tommy furrows his eyebrows when they stop talking as they arrive.

“We got the snacks!” Tubbo pushes them a bucket and shake. “How much did we miss?”

“Nothing,” Techno mutters. “It hasn’t started yet.”

“See Tommy,” Tubbo nudges him on the shoulder. “He doesn’t get it like we do.”

Tommy probably doesn’t get it. This is the first time he’s seated in a cinema, food in his hands and a friend by his side. It feels surreal because weeks ago this wouldn’t be fathomable.

He’s had his fair share of experiences over missions. Sometimes George and Dream took him to theme parks or diners in between their kills. That, or they would have to spend a couple of days at a particular location and one of the older boys would manage to fit in something special. It was rare, very rare. Barely ever happened, but when it did, Tommy felt really lucky.

The room dims down and Tommy tenses momentarily. There aren’t many other people in the room. There is a couple seated at the front and a group of girls a couple of rows ahead of them. Tommy glances over at the other three, noticing how their eyes gaze at the screen in front of them.

It’s huge. Tommy is used to small box TVs and the tiny television Dream had found at a garage sale a while back. This is cool.

Tommy finds himself enjoying himself. He may keep an eye on Techno from the corner of his eyes, and almost flinches when the violence seemed a bit too much like his past, but he almost really relaxes.

That is, until the movie finishes. The group leaves the darkroom with smiles, except Tommy. He’s still processing the ending and reassures himself that the violence is not real and it is all fiction. He should not be on edge – Dream would be disappointed if he found out he was so on edge. Maybe it’s the premise of the movie or the fact that it felt so much like what he’s had to do in his past.

It takes him back to the blood and scars. The screaming and haunting faces. He’s with people, this should not be something he worries about. But he does.

The hairs on Tommy’s back freeze. He feels eyes on his back. He turns his body and notices a man leaving the room he was just in. When was he in there? Tommy had scoped out the whole room and hadn’t seen the figure.

But he was probably the man on the date with the blonde-haired woman.

“Tommy?” Wilbur nudges him and he almost freezes again. “You okay, kid? The movie wasn’t too scary for you, was it?”

Tommy doesn’t process his words as he says them. He's not in his element, he is still focusing on every sound and face around him. He isn't thinking straight, as he should be. “It was good, I’ve never been to a cinema before.”

“What?” Techno and Tubbo stop their conversation when Wilbur’s voice goes stiff. “You haven’t been to a cinema before?”

Tommy snaps back into reality. His coverup story is delivered like it's the truth. “I lived in the country; we didn’t have much shit around there.”

“Oh,” Wilbur is still in disbelief. “Tommy.”

Tommy’s heart races. “Yeah?”

Wilbur is silent.

"What?"

“We’re going to watch so many movies,” he says suddenly and grips the boy’s shoulder. “And you don’t have a say because I’ve already decided. We’ll try all the food you haven’t tried before and do the shit you haven’t done. Sound good?”

Tommy’s eyes land on Tubbo who has a toothy grin and Techno who still stares at him with interest and carefulness.

“You don’t think it’s weird?” He says lowly, playing with the sleeves of his hoodie.

“A bit,” Wilbur shrugs. “But it’s fine. I realize you’ve grown up differently from us, which is fine.”

Tommy still thinks Wilbur is annoying and a prick. But Wilbur is also tolerable, Wilbur is nice. He hasn’t always been used to that.

“Thanks,” Tommy says because he doesn’t know what else he can do. “I’d like that.” A lot.

Dream does not wear his mask, but that does not mean he is not the assassin he once was.

His knife skills are quick, and his technique has not changed. The blade pushes through the heart of the man and he falls to the floor. Dream pulls his knife out and the blood pools.

He calls Quackity. “I finished.”

He can hear shuffling on the other hand before he is met with sounds of surprise. *“Already?!”*

Dream rubs his cheeks. His face is smeared with the blood of the man. He'll clean it out later.

“Yeah,” he mutters and looks away from the death. “You underestimate me, Quackity. I'll finish the job when I want to.”

“This is why I need someone like you, Dream. You're fast and you get the job done. You're someone I need!”

“Shut the fuck up,” Dream glares into the phone. “We had a fucking deal.”

“We did,” Quackity sighs. “I hope you consider it. You know, your kid brother – with the money I'm offering, he could afford college. And not some community one, I'm talking big. He'll have a promising future, which is indeed what you want.”

Dream is taught to lack hesitance. But when Tommy is mentioned, he considers it for a split second.

“Quackity,” Dream expresses. “I'll find the money another way, I'm not killing anymore. This was a one-off deal between you and me, it won't be happening again.”

“Admit it,” Quackity hisses. “You were born for this. I've run my business for years and you're incomparable to anyone else. They're sloppy and need shaping – and although they're good at what they do, I need great.”

Dream exhales and his eyes linger on the body once more. Quackity's deal with him is simple, he'll complete this one kill for him, and he'll receive full protection for Tommy. Although the kid can carry himself, he knows he won't always be there for the kid. Especially with the presence of The Academy on their back.

Plus, Quackity wants to help him take down The Academy. Dream won't admit it to anyone, but he needs help. He's the top Graduate, he is quick on his feet and his mind works wonders. But Quackity's helpful. He's informative and has the equipment he needs.

“I need you to come back now. I hope you're not sloppy with your work, Dream. You know that I have people on my back after me.”

Dream does. He grunts into the phone and begins to clean the mess. His blade almost pokes into the man's wrist, and he almost traces the 'A' into the skin as his mind will do with no doubt. He won't leave his mark, this is strictly Quackity's business and nothing else.

The man he has killed is a corrupt businessman who exploits his employees. Dream refuses to kill anyone, anymore. Even with what Quackity is offering. This kill was a little easier knowing he wasn't a good person. Every kill is easy, though. But this one doesn't unsettle him as much as it would. He's no longer forced to kill the innocent, so the least he can do is kill the guilty to repay for his past.

“Get back,” Quackity instructs. “I'll treat you to dinner, on me.”

“We'll leave tonight,” Dream needs to get back home as soon as possible.

“You're not the one who should be demanding things from me, but I guess I'll make an exception for you.”

Dream ends the call and cleans his kill.

Chapter End Notes

quick update! slightly shorter than usual but i'm proud i got this out earlier than i thought

i hope you enjoy today's update! more secrets unraveling, and dream will finally be home next update so that's something to look forward to.

more with phil and wilbur's side of the story. are you guys interested in seeing that? this is more of a tommy centric story though, but i will include the occasional perspective of wilbur but more of dream.

leave kudos and comments if you can! (constructive criticism is much appreciated!!)

Prediction

Chapter Summary

“You stabbed yourself?!” Wilbur exclaims incredulously. “How did you manage that?”

Tommy’s cheeks heat in embarrassment. “I was trying to cut fruit.”

“You’re such a fucking child.”

“It’s not my fault!” Tommy frowns grabbing the milk. “Dream was talking to me, and I can’t fucking multitask.” He can, he’s just out of practice. That, and he overestimated his cutting abilities. He can use a knife well, all for the wrong reasons.

He can poke someone’s heart with his eyes closed. Today, he found out that he cannot do the same with fucking fruit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream comes home. Tommy doesn’t know when he starts referring to their apartment as ‘home’ but if it isn’t, then where is?

Dream appears the same when he enters through the wooden front door. He still stands strong but there is a burden on his back, the journey a likely tiring experience. It is three in the morning, the birds haven’t woken, and the sun hasn’t seized the sky, not for a few more hours. Yet, both boys are awake, and they observe each other’s moments.

Tommy should be asleep, the dark circles under his eyes evident of that. But nightmares keep him awake, and so does the arrival of his big brother.

“Miss me?” Dream breaks the silence first. He drops his bags on the marbled flooring and raises his arms. “Am I going to get a hug?”

Tommy scowls. “In your dreams, bitch.”

Dream does not take ‘no’ for an answer. He strides to the boy and wraps his arms around him, much to the younger’s protests. Tommy attempts to push his arms away, and kick his stomach, but Dream has always been stronger. He ends up laying on the couch by him, but his left arm stays tightly around the boy’s shoulder.

“You should be asleep,” Dream says, glancing down at the boy. He notices the lack of sleep immediately.

“Well, I’m not tired,” Tommy lies. “Tell me about your trip. Who did you go to meet again?”

“People who work with Quackity. Had a couple of meetings with them, they wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to take down their company.”

“I bet they were a bunch of pussies,” Tommy mutters, and Dream snorts.

“You could say that.” Dream shrugs his shoulders. “Tell me about your week,”

They used to have conversations like this at night. Tommy would manage to sneak out of his room (he was the best in his class for a reason) and meet the boys. They’d ask him questions about his day, and Tommy would respond. When they could not, Sapnap and George would find a way to talk to him during mealtimes and Dream would whisper with him between classes.

(He tells them about challenging tasks and the lessons they are taught that day. Sapnap gives him advice and George makes him recite words in Arabic because apparently – his words, not Tommy’s – *he can always get better.*)

“I worked at Niki’s for a couple days. I also slept over at Tubbo’s once and went to the movies with Wilbur.”

Dream raises an eyebrow quickly. “You slept over?” He knows that Tommy can’t sleep with anyone else present. He must sleep alone, or in the presence of Dream, Sapnap, and George. Otherwise, he cannot. None of them can.

“It was in a guest room; I didn’t really have a choice.”

“How come?” Dream questions suspiciously. He trusts Tommy, he does not trust any of them.

“They could tell I hadn’t been sleeping,” Tommy sighs.

“Tommy,” Dream complains. “I gave you three rules to follow.” Tommy recites them in his mind. To respond to his messages, to eat, and to sleep well.

“I think two out of three is a brilliant effort,” Tommy says back, leaning away from Dream to no prevail as he won’t move his arm. “I physically could not sleep, I tried to. Don’t blame me.”

“I wasn’t,” Dream mutters. “Is it...?”

He doesn’t finish the question. He is mentioning the haunting faces and the murders of the past. He will not ask aloud, though. Tommy barely nods his head.

“Go to sleep,” Dream reaches for a cushion and tosses it at the younger boy. He knows that Dream’s presence has always somehow saved him from them. Like the assassin he was, he fights the nightmares away. “I’ll be here.”

Tommy does not remember closing his eyes, but he does remember falling asleep.

Tommy awakes the next morning to the smoke detector going off.

Dream stands in the kitchen, smoke in the air and a loud ring echoing around the apartment. Tommy groans into his cushion, as the time he gets a decent sleep, he is only interrupted.

The ringing continues, and Dream grabs a broom from the pantry to make it stop. Tommy gets sick of the noise and reaches under the couch to grab their spare knife. One flick of his wrist and the knife hits the dead center of the smoke detector, the sound drowning into the air.

“Let me sleep,” Tommy pushes his face into the couch cushion with complaint.

“It’s late anyway,” Dream tells him. “Get up, you can nap later.”

“Naps are for children.”

“Exactly,” Dream replies and Tommy flips him off, not looking up yet. He needs a moment to adjust to the harsh sunlight spilling into the room and the crying birds outside their balcony. “Get up, I’m making waffles. You can help if you want.”

Tommy begrudgingly stands up and stretches his back before he joins his older brother in the kitchen. They are taught many things at The Academy. Many languages, how to kill, how to breathe underwater for longer than five minutes. What they are not taught, is to cook.

But Dream’s good at everything he does. And the kitchen doesn’t smell too bad, apart from the apparent smoke.

“I burned the first batch,” Dream explains. “The second one came out okay though. Help me cut some fruits.”

Tommy nods his head, waiting by the counter as Dream grabs the bananas, strawberries, and blueberries. He washes them for the younger boy and hands him a kitchen knife with a wary glance.

One downside of growing up at The Academy is that they are taught to be the best assassins possible. They are not taught normal things, that any other person would learn. Dream knows most of these things though, so he helps Tommy when he can. It makes Tommy wonder if this is how it’s like to be human. To be normal.

Tommy chops the fruits carefully, and both boys dissolve into chatter.

“I’ll be at Quackity’s this afternoon. We can go do something afterward if you want.”

Tommy bites his tongue, carefully removing the stem from the strawberries. “Wilbur said he wanted to go the arcade with me.”

“Wilbur?” Dream hums. “I want to meet him.”

“He’s a bitch, you’ll hate him.”

Dream chuckles. “That’s okay.”

Tommy continues to cut up the fruits, and Dream turns around every so often to see how he’s doing. “You don’t have to cut the strawberries up much. The bananas into smaller pieces, like this.” He shows him, and Tommy follows. “Well done, kid.”

“Not a kid,” Tommy retorts absentmindedly. “Can you drop me off at the bakery, today?”

“Sure,” Dream shrugs.

“You know, they’re a bit suspicious of you. Wilbur thinks you’re a bit of a wrong’en,” Tommy speaks. “He always asks questions about you, it’s very annoying.”

“What?” Dream asks slowly, but Tommy is too busy cutting to notice the wariness set in his tone.

“Yeah, I don’t try and give anything away though. They’re all persistent though, even Niki.”

“Tommy,” Dream deadpans. “You haven’t given anything away.” He does not ask it as a question, it’s a statement.

“I haven’t,” Tommy looks up and multitasks. “I’m not going to fuck up again.”

“You didn’t fuck up the first time,” Dream mutters.

“Yes, I – oh *fuck*,” Tommy sees red on his hands and the knife drops. He missed the fruit like an idiot and cuts into his hand. It’s the first time he has seen his own blood in a while. At The Academy, the sight was a usual occurrence. “Fuck.”

Dream steps to him, to see the damage. There is quite a bit of blood, so he grabs paper towels and forces them into Tommy’s other hand. “Sit down.”

“It’s a bit of blood,” Tommy pushes him away. “Nothing I’m not used to, was just startled, that’s all.”

Dream exhales. “Sit down, Tommy.”

“I’m fine, Dream!” Tommy blurts. “I can handle it.” He used to handle his scars and burns. He does not think of the times Sappnap had sat beside him, to wrap up his bandages, or when George would sneak him medicine during his colds. He does not think of when Dream would look out for him, making sure he wasn’t alone.

But Tommy is fine, now. He’s dealt his worse.

“You shouldn’t have to handle it yourself!” Dream shouts back. “I don’t give a fuck if you’re used to it, just sit down.”

Tommy freezes. The loud noise reminds him of training lessons when Dream would shout, and Dream would hit. Tommy sits down.

“I’m sorry for shouting,” Dream returns with bandages. “Shit, I’m sorry, Tommy. I just don’t want you to handle that yourself.”

“It’s only a bit of blood.”

“And you’re only sixteen.”

Tommy glances away from Dream as he holds his hand to treat it. “Sorry for ruining the fruit.”

“Don’t worry about that,” The older reassures. “I’ll lay off next time, I promise. You’re my kid brother, it’s an instinct to look out for you.” Tommy lingers with his words, under Dream finishes and brings the two plates back. They eat their meal, the tension dying when Dream asks about Wilbur again and Tommy begins to rant about him. Soon, their fight is forgotten.

Theseus is shoved into a white room. The doors close behind him and he stands, emotionless. Waiting, counting. He counts to sixty, and then back to zero. He does not stop.

A test. They are shoved into a white room with white walls and a white floor. They will go insane. Only the greatest students will make it out, sane. The rest will be killed.

It is Theseus' turn. He stands for hours, in the middle of the room. He watches the walls and breathes. They are not told of the time of this test, so they cannot prepare. They are not told when they are allowed out either.

Theseus recalls a boy in his class, who had entered the white room a few months ago. He returned a week later and had forgotten everything. He is killed.

Rumors say they are kept here before they join The Academy. They remain in the room until they forgot about their past, and until then, they are not allowed out. That is why many of the students in his class start late because it takes them a longer turn to stay and forget.

Today, Theseus must not forget. Otherwise, he will not survive.

Dream's words echo through him. *Do not stop counting, and don't lose track of your time. It will be your downfall.*

Sapnap had then retorted, *He'll stop counting, eventually. Just try and remember.*

Theseus stops the memory, to continue counting. His feet will stay cemented to the floor until he cannot stand.

It is five hours when he finally sits down. He crosses his legs and continues to stare at the wall. Twenty-three. Twenty-four. Twenty-five.

The first stage is the easiest, his other classmates have said. The ones who have completed the white room first. They brag and inform each other of the stages. The second stage is doubt. Is the worry that you are forgotten. That the Teachers have forgotten that they trapped you in the room and will be found unbreathing and dead.

The thought creeps up on Tommy. He ignores it as he is told.

The third stage is when voices are heard. He hears Dream's first. Small whispers that creep up his skin, yet he forces his body to remain in position. Sapnap's taunts are next, and then George's disapproval.

Theseus rubs his hands on the ground, his skin burning. They are derived from sensation, from touch. The floors and walls are bare.

Then, Theseus sees faces. He will go insane, so he closes his eyes.

He continues to count. He opens his eyes eventually, so the cameras know that he is not asleep. They are not allowed to, otherwise, they are disqualified – they have failed.

More hours pass. Theseus eventually stops counting. He grasps his mind and forces himself to remember.

Under his breath, he repeats the words, *George, Sapnap, Dream*, until his mouth is dry. He will continue.

The doors open ten hours later. Strong hands grip his shirt and push him into the open. Theseus has lived.

“Hey Tommy,” Wilbur arrives at the bakery, scanning the boy before he sits down on one of the stools.

“Hey bitch,” Tommy mutters back. “Stop looking so happy.”

Wilbur frowns immediately. “Geez, sorry.”

“Bad apology, two out of ten.”

Wilbur takes out his book. A literature that he is obsessed with and won’t stop speaking about.

“What’s with you today?”

“A Monday, innit?” Tommy sighs. “Tubbo’s not fucking responding to my messages.” The reason is because Tubbo has promised to give him a DVD from the other day. Tommy remembers watching it at his house, and Tubbo refuses to drop it at his apartment, and instead deliver it in person.

“Aww, Tommy,” Wilbur’s grin is ugly. “Your first friend.”

“I hate you.”

“He has school, he’s coming to the arcade. Did you forget?”

“Oh,” Tommy sighs. “I thought it was just going to be us.” Not that he cares. In fact, he's happier that the boy is coming along.

“And Tubbo. And Techno.”

Tommy smirks and starts on Wilbur’s latte. The man no longer asks for one, Tommy just has to make it. “I’d assume Techno didn’t want to come. Isn’t he too good for us?”

“He is, but I guess he wants to get to know you more.”

“Gross.”

“Tell me about it,” Wilbur agrees, and Tommy almost reaches over the counter to punch him. As he makes the older man latte, Wilbur mentions his hand. “What happened?”

Tommy sighs. “I stabbed myself.”

“You stabbed yourself?!” Wilbur exclaims incredulously. “How did you manage that?”

Tommy’s cheeks heat in embarrassment. “I was trying to cut fruit.”

“You’re such a fucking child.”

“It’s not my fault!” Tommy frowns grabbing the milk. “Dream was talking to me, and I can’t fucking multitask.” He can, he’s just out of practice. That, and he overestimated his cutting abilities. He can use a knife well, all for the wrong reasons.

He can poke someone's heart with his eyes closed. Today, he found out that he cannot do the same with fucking fruit.

"Dream's back?" Wilbur raises his eyebrows.

"Yeah, he came back early this morning," Tommy passes Wilbur his latte after attempting to do the cool trick Niki does with the milk. It isn't too bad. "Why?"

"I want to meet him." "*I want to meet him.*" Dream had said before.

"Why the fuck?" Tommy mutters, leaning on the tabletop.

Wilbur shrugs his shoulders. "Invite him to the arcade with us."

"Only if Techno doesn't come," Tommy mutters, not particularly liking the addition to the Soot family. "It'll be as awkward as hell."

Wilbur shrugs his shoulders. "Okay then."

Tommy smiles to himself because he knows Dream will not agree.

Dream agrees to go to the arcade with Tommy.

"I told you I wanted to meet up with Wilbur," Dream says while shoving on a black shirt. "Are you ready yet?"

"No," Tommy grumbles. He doesn't want them to meet. Wilbur has shown his obvious disliking for Dream, the same vice versa. He wants to have fun for his first time at the arcade and doesn't want anyone to stop him. Luckily, Tubbo will be there so he can just ditch the two.

Dream combs his dirty blond hair back and takes his black jacket. "Did you use this?"

"Yes," Tommy does not deny the claim.

Dream rolls his eyes. "Remind me to take you shopping later." Tommy despises shopping. After their first time, he does not want to go again. He's content with stealing Dream's clothes anyway.

Dream helps Tommy pick out clothes, and it ends up being simple dark jeans he owns and a red hoodie. He doesn't want to be called emo again.

Which reminds him. "Dream, what the fuck is an emo?"

Dream wheezes because his laugh sounds like a dying train on the brink of breaking. "It's basically Sapnap."

"What does that even mean?" Tommy mumbles.

Dream shoves a red cap on his head. "Don't worry about it."

They leave the apartment and take Dream's car to the location, which is close to *Las Nevadas*, so Dream knows the way there. Tommy's knee bounces in anxiousness until Dream tells him to stop, and that it'll be okay.

"I won't embarrass you in front of your friends," Dream promises with a laugh.

"Wilbur's older than you, I think that's the most embarrassing part of it all."

"Oh," Dream thinks. "How old is he?"

"Twenty-five."

They arrive at the arcade, and Tommy directly sees Wilbur standing outside, on his phone. Tubbo is not around.

"Where the fuck is Tubbo?" Tommy gets out of the car and walks to Wilbur, Dream on his tail.

"He has work," Wilbur explains.

"Tubbo has a fucking job?" Tommy exclaims.

"Can you speak a single sentence without swearing?" Wilbur diverts his question.

Tommy ponders. "I don't fucking know." Wilbur rolls his eyes, but before he responds, his eyes settle on the man behind Tommy. Dark eyes meet with vibrant green, and both their stances become defensive. Wilbur is taller than Dream and stands up straight, but Dream is much more built.

"Dream," Wilbur nods his head slowly, his arms crossed and his eyes looking at Tommy's brother from head to toe very carefully.

"Wilbur," Dream replies. Tommy sends him a look. "It's nice to meet you."

Wilbur nods his head and frowns. Tommy sighs. "Tommy let's head inside. I'll show you the art of arcade."

Tommy follows quietly and as soon as they step inside, Tommy's excitement bursts. The room is darker, the walls a dark blue and the arcade games flash neon and bright colors. It's huge, not many people around but the games are loud and the possibilities, endless. Tommy is about to reach for one of the games, but Wilbur drags him away.

"Follow me, kid." Wilbur grins and takes him to the front desk, where the rows of toys and their purchasing costs are. Wilbur explains. "We have to play certain games to get tickets. With them, we can afford different prizes. What do you like from here?"

Tommy's eyes scan the list. "Holy shit, a gun."

"Seriously?" Dream stands by them. "Out of all the options, Toms?"

Tommy glances back. "Fuck yeah." He looks over at Wilbur who has emotion stirring in his eyes. "Can we do it?"

"Sure," Wilbur shrugs. "I practically grew up here. We'll try." So, while Wilbur takes Tommy around to the different games, Dream follows behind them slowly. Tommy wants to tell Dream to

lay back and relax, so he doesn't have to stay by Tommy the whole time, but Dream doesn't trust Wilbur yet so there is no way to stop the older man from coming with them.

"We'll start with easier games," Wilbur says. "So, I can get a scope of how good you are. They won't give us as many tickets, but we'll work our way to the top." Wilbur explains how redemption games will get them tickets while other games will not.

"Get ready to get beaten, bitch," Tommy grins.

"I'd like to see you try, kid."

They start with air hockey. Tommy has never played this before, and when Wilbur finds out, he makes a weird face again and explains it to him. Before they begin, Dream whispers pointers in Tommy's ear, which Tommy will follow because Dream's teachings have always been useful. He ends up winning the game. And the next one.

Wilbur then challenges Dream. They go on for a while because Wilbur doesn't like losing and Dream is competitive as shit. Tommy watches for a bit, cheering on Dream and then Wilbur when he starts looking sadder but eventually leaves. They will be going on for a while and Tommy wants to enjoy the experience while he can.

He finds out that many games are rigged as shit while others are too easy to give him a large number of tickets. Dream and Wilbur are calling his name at some point and find him with a bundle of tickets in his hands.

"How the fuck did you do that?" Wilbur stares wide-eyed at the boy. He glances at Tommy as if he has hit a jack point.

"Easy, innit?" Tommy shrugs.

"Basketball next," Dream mentions. "Tommy, you're going down."

"Wait," Wilbur instructs, his eyes still on Tommy. "We'll fold these up, so it's easier to hold that way." After Wilbur teaches him how to, they move over to the basketball hoops. Wilbur and Tommy go first.

They never had basketball hoops at The Academy. The large field at the back was for running and drills. There was an obstacle course that was used every once in a while, but they never had hoops. But Tommy is fast and quickly gets used to tossing the balls in the air and getting it through. Once he finds his rhythm, he can't stop.

He beats Wilbur by a landslide.

"You're unbelievable," And for once Wilbur isn't mocking or teasing him, genuine impress laced in his voice.

"Wilbur," Dream says strictly. "Let's go."

"You're on," Tommy notices how Wilbur's voice isn't playful or kind. The rivalry is what Tommy fears. But he still watches as Dream begins to throw quickly, his arms swift and making it seem easy. A couple of people stand around to watch as the numbers flicker upwards, but they leave soon after. Tommy notices how Wilbur can keep up well, but not well enough.

"I beat you," Dream does not look at Wilbur, he looks at Tommy instead, because his points are larger than what the latter had gotten.

"I have an injured hand," Tommy rebuttals.

"It was an easy game," Wilbur admits when Dream wins more tickets than he does. "C'mon Tommy, let's try something else."

Before they escape deeper into the room, Dream grabs Tommy's hand. "Hey, I have to make a quick phone call with Quackity. Will you be okay with him?"

"Yeah, don't sweat," Tommy reassures, and Dream leaves. The boy meets Wilbur and they walk to one of the car games. As they sit down in the seats, Wilbur nudges the younger boy.

"Are you good?"

"Yeah," Tommy nods his head. "This is fun."

"I'm glad," Wilbur smiles softly. "Where'd your brother go?"

"To make a quick phone call," Tommy deposits a few coins in, and the game starts. He thinks that by starting the game, that Wilbur will lay off and start talking about the game again, but he is only proven wrong as this is a type of trap, and he can't avoid the questions without throwing the game completely from the lack of concentration.

"Okay then," Wilbur bites the inside of his cheek. "Are you okay with him?"

Tommy sighs loudly. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"It's just..."

"Yes?" Tommy doesn't glance from his game. He likes winning, just as much as Dream. "Of course, I'm alright with him. He's raised me for practically my whole life. Lay off,"

"Sorry," Wilbur apologizes and that's all he says.

Dream eventually returns but Tommy's mood is ruined.

"Hey, you okay?" Dream glances at him, noticing that Tommy seems slightly uncomfortable. "I'll take over the game. I want to talk to Wilbur."

"Okay," Tommy escapes to the bathroom. There, he stares at his reflection, his empty eyes and emotionless expression. Once he sees haunting faces when his eyes blink closed, he decides that it's best to return to Dream and Wilbur. He expects them to be fighting or shouting at one another. Instead, they sit close in hushed whispers while in the middle of the game.

Tommy can read people well. He had long hours of lessons to observe people and understand body language. From across, they are having an important conversation. Dream does most of the talking, so he is the one who initiated the conversation and leads it. He is frowning, seeming unimpressed.

Tommy finds a smaller arcade game to play himself. Soon, both the older boys join him.

"We have enough tickets," Wilbur says lightly. "Hey,"

"Okay," And Tommy joins him at the front desk. Instead of getting a larger plastic gun, Tommy resorts to two smaller ones.

"Are you happy with your toys?" Dream teases.

“Watch out, or I will shoot you.” Tommy threatens.

On the car ride home, after their awkward goodbye to Wilbur, Tommy asks Dream a question.

“What did you ask him about?”

“Nothing really,” Dream avoids the question. “If you want to open them now, you can, but don’t make such a mess with the cardboard and plastic.”

Tommy will anyway. As he rips the package open, he asks again. “But what did you talk to him about?”

“I don’t know Tommy,” Dream exhales as they stop at a red light. “I made sure he was an okay person.”

“He’s a dick,” Tommy mutters and plays with the toy bullets. “He asks too many questions.”

“Yeah?” Dream turns to him.

“He doesn’t fucking stop, it’s so annoying.” Tommy has secrets but Wilbur doesn’t need to know them. Wilbur hides things too, and Tommy doesn’t give a shit so he expects the same back for him. If only that were the case. “I can’t feel normal if he asks too many things.”

“Do you want me to do something about it?”

“No!” Tommy exclaims because asking Dream to threaten Wilbur is definitely not on his to-do list. “If worse comes to worst, I’ll just stop talking to him.”

Dream furrows his eyebrows. “I thought he was your friend?”

Tommy’s back straightens and his shoulders hunch. “I don’t have friends, Dream. I shouldn’t.”

“You’re not an assassin anymore,” Because sometimes Tommy needs reminding. “The guy cares for you – and I guess if he’s your first friend, then I’ll tolerate it for now.”

“Well, you were my first friend,” Tommy grumbles because the thought out loud – of having his first friend at the age of sixteen does not sound the best.

“You’re my brother, it doesn’t count.”

“Well, not blood brother,” Tommy mutters. “*Technically*, you were.”

He glances at Dream when he does not speak. “Dream?”

“Have you ever thought about your real family, Tommy?” Dream questions. “The one before The Academy?”

“Not really, since they got rid of our memories of them,” Sometimes Tommy will see shadows of his brothers, father, and mother in his dreams. They disappear faster than they appear. “Why are you asking?”

“I’ve been thinking about it recently,” Dream explains. “I just wanted to ask, that’s all.”

Tommy squints his eyes at him and hums in response warily. He drops the subject.

Dream is trusted by the Teachers and Headmaster. They teach their students that trust should be limited, as it is the easiest factor to be used against them. Dream uses their trust as an advantage for himself.

He finds a hidden room in The Academy. One stacked with files and heavy codes locks the room away from all the students. He knew the existence of the room; he knew that there was a place that stored the memories that were stolen from them.

He must be quick. He cannot be caught.

Dream walks over to the first row of files in his sight. They are boxes of papers and boxes worth of information. He can't read through much; his time is limited as the clock above his head ticks through his soul.

The first file belongs to a boy of the youngest class. He is One and his real name is Matthew. The paper lists his blood type, the name of his mother and father. His strengths and weaknesses. His fears and background. There is more, but Dream does not have enough time to see through.

He travels into the darker of the room. He finds that as he progresses, there are larger boxes, more paper worth for each student. He guesses it is because of the collected information over the years. The younger class of 10-year-olds will have a small amount of information, while the Graduates will have stacks of paper for each of them.

Dream finds a box that belongs to the 14s. He is Twenty-six and his name is Mohammed. More information is listed, but not much. Details stop when he finishes his third year. Dream knows he does not make it past then.

Dream keeps searching. He must not run out of time.

He keeps digging. Even Dream, who is swift on his feet cannot locate the mixed categorization of the boxes. He knows he only has time to search through a few more papers before he must return.

He then finds Theseus' class. He is in the class of 15-year-olds. One year from Graduation, one year before their final exam. Dream has enough time to find his own papers or stay here to look through Theseus'.

He does hesitate to look through the younger boy's. Flickering through each student of the class, he stops at Sixteen.

Theseus' face stares back at him. His memory is wiped in the photo, what is left is a lonely boy with empty eyes and pale skin. His eyes struggle to stay open, but he will be the strongest and most committed in his class.

Dream can hardly look away. Because before that photo was taken, Theseus would have been a normal kid who had family, who had friends, and wondrous life. Now, he is destined to be a killer, he is destined for stained red hands and teachings of murder.

Dream flips to see his father's name. *Phillip*, it says, and Dream scowls a little. Because this is the man who gave up Theseus, who left him for The Academy without a second thought. His mother's name is not disclosed, Dream assumes it is because she has passed.

Dream finds more. Theseus' strengths listed are his courage and confidence. Then his weaknesses, his lack of discipline, and inability to follow orders. His fears, of being alone. Of being forgotten.

Dream has a sick taste in his mouth when he remembers Theseus' nights after the white room. He had not spoken to anyone and stuck to Dream like a lifeline when he could.

There is more. Unlined in thick red marker on the bottom of his papers and states, *prediction*.

Not expected to pass Graduation.

Dream swallows thickly, his bones turning to ice. Theseus will not live past sixteen, he is not expected to. He will not grow up; he is not expected to. Dream knows he is at the top of his class, though. The facts do not make sense when Teachers use him as an example for his class and the Headmaster's eyes linger on him the longest when he watches lessons.

Dream's eyes flip the page. Once he reads the red ink, his eyes widen, and he realizes that he can't breathe.

Dream stumbles out of the filed room. It will seem untouched, even if Dream has felt the future and the previous lives and the predictions of the students.

Sapnap is suspicious when he sees Dream seem on edge. Dream is never on edge. "You alright, man?"

Dream ignores him and passes through the hallway to the training grounds. He bumps into George, and instead of stopping to speak, he rushes through the white hallways.

"Dream?!" George calls from behind him, before asking Sapnap who must have caught up. "What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know," Dream pushes the large doors and steps outside, to where Theseus' class has a lesson in the field today. His eyes scan through the boys, and he visibly relaxes when he notices the familiar mop of brown hair.

Sapnap and George stand by him after they catch up. "What happened?" They notice that Dream's eyes won't leave Theseus'. "Did something happen to him?"

"No," Dream denies but decides he will observe the rest of the lesson. The unsettled pit in his stomach relaxes, although still seeming on edge. Sapnap stays for a while, but he has a class to teach and leaves. George stays for a little while longer before he goes.

Dream does not forget the written words inked on the white paper.

Will be killed by Graduates, it had read.

Because Dream, Sapnap, and George's last test hadn't been the final exam before Graduation. The Headmaster would have noticed their closeness with the boy. He always watches, he always lurks. He notices their friendship and will use it to his advantage and against them.

Their last test is Theseus.

They will kill him, to prove that they are perfect. They will kill Theseus and he will not make it to Graduation.

Chapter End Notes

i had so much more planned for this chapter, but it got too long and i didn't want to throw it all at once! so a lot more to come in the next chapter. this story is primarily tommy-centric, but the next chapter will have a lot more dream and wilbur in it for more insight into the story.

thank you so much for reading! leave kudos and comments if you can (constructive criticism or any comments appreciated!)

also i wrote a tommy and wilbur one-shot lol
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/36309181>

Cage

Chapter Summary

“I’m aware of a few deities and their stories,” Tommy recalls. “Apollo, Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hermes,” Then he stops. “Theseus.”

Techno does not speak for a second. Tommy assumes it is because he is surprised. “Interesting.”

“Don’t you two start nerding out on me,” Wilbur grumbles. “I already have to deal with this at home.”

“Shut the fuck you, you literature fuck.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They smile.

“Sixteen and Graduate One. You will bring them back.”

“Yes sir.”

“They will kill you, or we will.”

“Yes sir.”

“Very well, you are dismissed.”

Dream knows he shouldn’t go threatening Tommy’s friends, but he can’t help it. Call it *big brother intuition*, but something feels wrong about Wilbur.

(“So, if I find out you’ve fucking hurt him,” Dream’s sharp glare and harsh tone make the man cower. “The situation won’t be so pretty.”)

Dream is protective of Tommy. Tommy can throw a knife with his eyes closed and has been trained by The Academy for almost his whole life, yet Sapnap, George and he have always had an extra impulse to make sure he is okay. And although he may not have needed the extra medicine that they snuck him or the careful tips, it was always a little better knowing that the shit he was in, was less bad than it had to be.

Red ink and flashing words enter his mind every once in a while, reminding the man that he has some fears which he cannot admit. One of them being his family getting hurt. Another being hurting the people he loves.

He could not live with himself, knowing his mistakes lead to Tommy's death. Knowing that it was his carelessness of holding a friendship with the younger boy, resulted in the Headmaster finding out and ready to turn it in a test to rip all his connections from him. He doesn't allow it, so he escapes with Tommy, and they promise to never go back.

But now he is back where he has started. He is in a whole predicament with Quackity, and he must face his past to let go of it.

Dream watches the younger boy sleep, laying down on the floor by his bed. He returns sometimes because Tommy isn't the only one with bad dreams.

Dream dreams of blood and murder. He dreams of himself with a gun, and his friends lined up in front of them. He is told to shoot, otherwise, they will do it for him. He takes pills to put him to sleep (he does not suggest them to Tommy, because the last time he took any type of medication not for a cold, it didn't turn out too well) but tonight, he is content to stay awake.

He hears Tommy's light breaths and watches the moon's spotlight through the bedroom window. Sometimes, hearing his younger brother alive and well, is enough air for him to breathe again.

Theseus is unmoving, underwater.

He has been under for four minutes, so far. Dream can only watch helplessly, and stare at his body submerged in the water. They are thick tanks that each of the students is trapped in separately, so they cannot track each other's progress. There are only small windows at the front, tinted at the back, so the Teachers can tell if one of them has submerged and stopped breathing.

It is a twisted game. They all watch, while the students in the water can only hope they are not the first ones to emerge from the waters. If they are too late, then they are in the water too long and will suffocate themselves.

Theseus is inside for five minutes now. Three students have raised at the same time. Dream watches their facial expressions, and they realize their fates, ignoring the fact that they are out of breath and close to collapsing. The Teachers wait for them, and they are taken away.

The rest of the students may stay underwater, knowing they cannot be the first ones out. They do not know they are safe if they escape now.

Sapnap walks up to Dream who stares at Theseus' tank. He never looks away. "Six minutes now. Theseus, still in there?"

It isn't a question worth answering because Theseus is usually one of the last out.

“He’ll be okay,” Sapnap reassures. “He always is.”

Six minutes pass. Dream’s eyes watch Theseus’ closed eyes and unmoving figure. He leans forward, but Sapnap grips his upper arm before letting go quickly. “Don’t.”

Six minutes and thirty seconds. The last boy who is not Theseus emerges. He gasps for air, but nothing is on his mind other than survival because he has succeeded. Failing a task is sometimes considered worse than death itself.

“Almost seven minutes,” George walks to them, his arms crossed. “He’s never made it past then.”

The drenched students around leave the tanks and stand with water and sweat dripping down their bodies and foreheads, waiting with the Teachers and Graduates. Some of them are excused, others must stay cold.

“Seven minutes,” someone says and Dream steps forward again. Sapnap stops him quickly.

“Dream,” He warns quietly. “You can’t interfere.”

Dream glares.

Seven minutes and ten seconds. Teachers look away, more of the students are taken back to their dorms.

Seven minutes and fifteen seconds is when Dream moves. Because he notices Theseus hasn’t twitched in a long time and he will not let the kid drown. He hears Sapnap shout and the Teachers who are ready to steer him away, but Dream has his mind set on Theseus and he will not stop until the kid is breathing again.

He leaps for the tank and his feet leap over the steps. Soon, his arms grip into the water and he pulls the kid out. At first, the boy does nothing. He lays limp in Dream’s hands, light and weightless. Then, he splutters and heaves for air.

Dream is dragged away and taken to the Headmaster’s office. They stare at him with a mix of disappointment and an indecipherable emotion because the students have never been able to read them.

“Graduate One,” they say slowly. “You know the repercussions of tampering with an exercise. I expected better from you.”

“I apologize,” Dream looks into their eyes because he knows the Headmaster dislikes it when their students look anywhere else.

“You will not avoid your punishment. I expect this to be a singular occurrence.”

“Yes, Headmaster.”

“Why did you do it?”

Dream blinks. “Excuse me – sir?”

They sigh. “Basic first-year teachings. You must know the consequences of connection. Sixteen may be predicted to be your fourth, but I expect you to treat him as you do with the other students.”

“Yes sir,” Dream nods his head. “Apologies, sir.”

“Graduate Two and Three are exceptions because of missions, and nothing else. We are quite lenient to allow this, do you not agree?”

“I agree, sir.”

“I expect high things from you, Graduate One. You are dismissed.”

Dream is beaten and bruised. He is taught his lesson, but he knows that he will repeat his actions in an instant if he must. They go easily, luckily, because he is a Graduate and honor goes a long way between the walls. They all know that he has endured the worst, and the punishment he endures now will never be considered harsh.

The next time Dream sees Theseus, the younger's eyes glaze over the extra wounds on his arms and legs. Dream is not happy with him and forces him into another room where no other Teacher can hear them. “You’re an idiot! You can have killed yourself! What have I told you, Theseus?”

“Five minutes, to count in my head,” Theseus says with guilt.

Dream sighs. “Promise me, that you won’t do it again.”

“I promise,” Theseus’ eyes linger on his skin. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry,” Dream speaks. “You and I are working with the tens today. Basic training, the Headmaster wants you to accompany me for today.”

Theseus seems lighter at the change of topic. He always does when he spends time away from constant lessons and tiring classroom work.

Dream knows that when Theseus has a slight spring in his step and chats on before they reach the classroom, that he has made the right decision. He does not regret a thing.

Quackity enters Dream’s office without knocking. He doesn’t usually and will not start now.

“Dream, my man, I need to speak to you about a few things.”

“Can it wait?” He stares at his computer and his eyes flicker at the man with the ridiculous beanie and spirited eyes. “I’m almost finished.”

“No time for that, I need you to tell me as much as you can about The Academy.” The rare times his boss is careful and serious is when Dream pays extra attention. He falls on the chair in front of his desk and leans back. “Start talking, I’m listening.”

Dream shrugs. “What do you need to know?”

“Everything.”

“I need more than that,” Dream stops typing. “There was a lot.”

“I’ve spoken to my company about it. Considering Sapnap is still there, and other factors – they are very willing to assist in your endeavors. However, we need to know what we are dealing with first.”

“The Academy is the best and most successful assassin agency in the country, if not, then the world,” The words roll off Dream’s tongue. “Children are taken there at the age of ten and are taught, trained, and study to become the best agent they can, until they turn sixteen, when they officially complete missions. However, some students start beforehand; the students who show potential and success.”

“Tommy was one of them?”

Dream stiffens. “Yes, he was.”

Quackity exhales. “Well, shit.”

“They teach fifty different languages, education subjects to a higher extent, and the basics of killing before lessons and exercises are introduced. Only the strongest survive.”

“Survive?” Quackity folds his arms.

“If a student lacks or falls behind, they are killed. If they are not strong, they are killed. If they perform the worst in their classes, they are killed. Do you understand?”

“I understand,” Quackity nods his head, but Dream knows he never will. Unless you are a student yourself and unless you undergo the experiences and feel the pain; the bruises, burns, hits, and punishments, then no one will ever understand.

“Why are you so interested, all of a sudden?” Dream stares calculated. “I know this isn’t because of Sapnap. You can’t care about someone you haven’t spoken to, for years.”

“Admittedly, I do worry for him.” Quackity shrugs his shoulders nonchalantly, but Dream’s eyes are trained well enough to pipe out the genuine concern and care that he has hidden from his relaxed exterior. “But it’s about something else, too.”

“I’m listening.” He never is not.

“We assumed that we were the only ones who knew of the location. Of course, we are aware of other agencies that require child assassins, but none of them are a threat to The Academy.”

“No one can be a threat,” Dream states. “The Academy is unstoppable.” They grew until their walls until they were sturdy enough, to not crumble. And although their best assassin has left, they still have an army of children training every day. They still have Sapnap and George who have only been beaten by each other and Dream.

Quackity slips his hands behind his head and relaxes into them. “That’s not what I mean, Dream.”

“Then, what do you?”

“Not one assassin agency will be a threat. We’ve had firsthand experience, that they create alliances and bonds that are almost unbreakable. However, we’ve found a certain... person who wants to take them down.”

“If they aren’t an assassin academy, then there is no possible way for them to be aware of The Academy.” Because although The Academy’s assassins would leave slashes of ‘A’s on the wrists

of their targets, the police had not yet discovered them. They were always left on an empty trail and would never figure out so. So, it can't be them.

“Who is it?” Dream slides his eyes closed and sees red.

“His name is Phil.” Quackity’s voice goes dark. “I knew him well in the past, and lately, I have found of his endeavors. They are preparing to take over the agency themselves and arrest all of them. That will include yourself and Tommy soon enough.”

“A random fucking guy,” Dream says in disbelief. “He can’t possibly believe he can take them down himself.”

“He’s willing to inform the police of them. His company has some of the best hackers in the country, and some individuals I’ve wanted on my team for a while. They’re preparing to bring justice after his wife was killed by one of their agents herself.”

“He’s not strong enough,” Because no one is strong enough even for The Academy. Even to take down them, they must take down other high assassination agencies in the process because of the tight alliances that have been created over the years.

“You’d be surprised,” Quackity stands. “I’ll prepare a meeting for tomorrow. Clear your schedule, it will be important.”

“Quackity,” Dream asks before he leaves. He stands up so their eyes lock. “Why are you so interested in this shit? You could let him arrest them all, yet you’re very keen to take him down.”

“I guess I could say Sapnap is a factor to it all,” Quackity shrugs. “But that would be a lie since I’ve forgotten how to love. I’ll say it’s for a better future for those kids. I won’t say anything you don’t want to hear, Dream, but those kids are highly trained, and I could use their help in the future. If they want to, they can join, but they do not deserve to live in prison.”

Dream doesn’t know how to feel about Quackity wanting to use the kids for his gain. He says it’s a choice if they want to join him, but is there really one?

They never have a choice; freedom, at The Academy. He wonders if those same students will have one and if they will ever escape. Or if life is a cage, and all they are waiting for, is to be set free by a key.

“Bring Tommy,” Quackity volunteers. “I know he’s gotten familiar with a bit of the staff here. I’ve warmed up to that kid, as well.”

Dream frowns and knows he won’t consider it because Tommy won’t step foot into that meeting room.

“Think about it,” Quackity catches the regard on his face. “I’ll send you the details about Phil, later.” He leaves the room, leaving Dream to bury his head in his thoughts.

Wilbur continues to apologize.

"I'm sorry," he says for the tenth time and Tommy wants to roll his eyes and bury his head seven feet under, so he doesn't have to hear Wilbur anymore. (Six feet doesn't seem like enough). "I shouldn't have pushed, I'm sorry, Tommy."

"If you fucking apologize one more time, I will shoot you." Tommy glares and Wilbur finally leans back in his seat.

"With what? Your plastic child gun?"

You have no idea, Tommy thinks to himself. "Yeah, it will do enough damage to take you out, too."

Techno snorts beside him, because apparently, he has decided to come to the bakery with his brother. Tommy still doesn't like him, but he doesn't think he will like anyone from the Soot family. Although Wilbur isn't exactly redeemed yet, he's forgiven him for being so overbearing at the arcade.

A customer comes in. Tommy switches quickly. "Hello, welcome to Niki's bakery. What can I get you for today?"

"Could I please have an iced tea and three cinnamon rolls, love?"

Tommy smiles. "Will that be all for today?"

"Yes, thank you," She enters her card details and sits by a back table as Tommy starts heating the cinnamon rolls from the counter. He notices Wilbur and Techno staring at him, closely.

"What?" he snaps.

"You change up very quickly," Wilbur smirks. "From one annoying child to a polite kid."

"Not all the customers are dicks like you, Wilbur. I have no reasoning to be annoying."

"He keeps roasting you," Techno notes at his brother. "I'm quite disappointed that you can't find anything in yourself to say anything back."

"He's a gremlin," Wilbur leans back in his seat. Tommy hums to himself lightly, a familiar song, and takes the cinnamon rolls to place them on the white plates he has. He then grabs a flavored tea and ice, finding an extra paper straw with it. He's more comfortable with his job now and finds everything so easy. Consistency allows him to perform at his best. Niki is impressed, and so is Wilbur when he pays extra close attention sometimes.

He hums to himself, to keep himself going. A song that he can't remember where from, but he knows it.

He places the tray on the woman's table. She grins. "Thank you." After she leaves, she leaves a large tip, and instantly, Tommy's day is brighter.

"Do you want to come over to ours, and watch a movie today?" Wilbur asks the boy. "We have to start on *Harry Potter* soon enough."

"I'm not hanging out with you for at least a week," Tommy rejects. "Your fault for being an

invasive prick yesterday.”

“I’m sorry for that, Tommy.” Wilbur apologizes again and Tommy groans.

“Stop apologizing!”

“Sor – okay.”

Techno rolls his eyes. “Tommy, can you make me a coffee?”

“Fine,” As the boy does, his eyes linger on Techno’s book. *Mythology; the story of Icarus*, it says.

“You a mythology nerd, Techno?” Tommy pipes an interest.

“Yes, I am.”

“Nice,” And Tommy goes back to making his coffee.

Techno raises an eyebrow.

“I’m aware of a few deities and their stories,” Tommy recalls. “Apollo, Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hermes,” Then he stops. “Theseus.”

Techno does not speak for a second. Tommy assumes it is because he is surprised. “Interesting.”

“Don’t you two start nerding out on me,” Wilbur grumbles. “I already have to deal with this at home.”

“Shut the fuck you, you literature fuck.”

“I can hear you guys from outside,” Tubbo enters the room and Tommy hides the utter excitement on his face. “I got the DVD, Tommy since you refuse to meet up with me.”

“Thanks, Tubs,” Tommy takes it from him and is ready to shove it in his backpack before Wilbur snatches it out of his hands.

“Up?” He questions confused; however, he does not tease.

“Give that back, you prick.”

“If you give Techno’s coffee to me, then sure.”

Tommy does not, and hands it Techno because he is a paying customer and Wilbur is not.

“Guess I can’t give it back, then,” Wilbur sighs dramatically. “We should watch it. A movie night.”

“I was going to watch it with Dream,” Tommy says plainly.

“Oh,” Something settles in Wilbur’s eyes, and he passes it back to the younger boy. It almost seems as if he’s scared.

Techno voices his thoughts for him. “Wilbur is scared of Dream.”

“You met him!?” Tubbo widens his eyes and sits on the other side of Wilbur. Tommy gives him a chocolate brownie before he starts asking. He notes down on a paper for Niki, to bake extra for the next morning. “Was he as mysterious as Tommy? I bet you, he’s like, an undercover spy for

aliens.”

“What the fuck is that meant to mean?” Tommy grumbles.

“Well, if he’s anything like you, then surely.” Tubbo reaches over the counter and pats his shoulder slowly.

“He’s okay,” Wilbur gulps.

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Of course, the fucker threatened you. Ignore him, he doesn’t mean it.”

“Wilbur’s idea is good,” Tubbo pipes up. “Let’s watch it at Wilbur’s. Only if I can use the chocolate fountain, though.”

Tommy blinks. “What the heck?”

“They have a chocolate fountain, god Tommy, you have to try it! You can dip your strawberries in it, and it tastes so good.”

“Tubbo, you know we only use that for special occasions. For parties and not regularly.”

“How rich are you?” Tommy asks incredulously. “Count me in.”

Wilbur’s face goes from disapproving to happier. “Okay then, movie at my place.” He explains to Techno after, that he’s ready to introduce the wonderful world of every classic to him, because apparently, Tommy needs educating.

The Soot’s house is as grand as he expects it to be. It’s a triple-story house, with a huge front yard and enough garage space for four cars.

Dream is apprehensive of the idea of Tommy going. He promises Dream that the knife strapped to his leg is still present and that he’ll leave immediately when he doesn’t feel comfortable. Dream reluctantly agrees.

Tubbo has been inside enough times before and leads Tommy to the living room while Techno and Wilbur go to their father’s office to speak to him.

“This place is huge,” Tommy whispers in Tubbo’s ear.

“Yeah, the first time I came inside, it was hard to adjust from being so used to sleeping in the back of Niki’s car so often.” Tommy knows Tubbo doesn’t have a good past, like him. Tubbo speaks about it from time to time, as if he hopes that one day, Tommy will speak to him about his life. “You’ll get used to it. Wilbur’s very persistent in inviting you over.”

“He’s weird.”

“He gets attached easily,” Tubbo says, and he is about to say more but he stops himself. “I’m going to go get snacks. Anything you want?”

“I don’t mind.”

“Okay bossman, make yourself at home – what Wilbur would say.”

Tommy glances around their huge living room, the size of Dream and his whole apartment. They have high ceilings and long couches that bring the décor together, to make the room feel a little homier. Paintings are hung up around as well as family photos. Tommy stifles a laugh at Wilbur’s

school photos hung on a wall, his grin wide, revealing his bright colored braces. There are more of Techno, his glasses on and off over the years. He shuffles around, seeing their father in one. The man is taller than both his sons, but as the years go on, he appears shorter. It makes sense since Wilbur and Techno are giants.

Tommy's eyes scan on a particular picture, of the two guys and their father. Their mother is in the picture too. He remembers Wilbur mentioning that she had been out of the picture from a young age. Wilbur seems around six in the photograph.

One family photo grabs his attention. Another thing that Wilbur had told him, is that he used to have a younger brother. The boy is only a baby in the given photo, wisps of curly brown hair on his head, and his eyes closed. In one photo, his mother holds in. In the next, he's slightly older, and Wilbur has him in his arms.

Tommy feels as though he's invading their privacy and takes a seat on the couch. As soon as he collapses, Tubbo enters with packets of food and a bowl of popcorn balanced in both hands. Tommy helps him set them down on the small table in front of them.

"They're taking fucking forever," Tubbo groans. "Let's start without them."

Tommy shrugs his shoulders, not particularly caring. "Sure."

They start the movie. Tommy hears Wilbur's shouts behind them, yelling to not start without him. The older man arrives in the room, the movie already started. He sits next to Tommy and scowls. "You two are so impatient."

"Don't be so slow next time," Tubbo watches the TV. "And shut up."

Tommy passes Wilbur the bowl of buttery popcorn. Wilbur smiles and takes it. Techno does not join them until much later, about halfway through the movie. He sits on another couch and takes out his mythology book to read. Wilbur rolls his eyes and throws him a packet of salt and pepper chips. Techno catches it with one hand and shoves it by him.

Tommy enjoys the movie more than the first time he had watched the masterpiece. He allows himself to get attached to the characters because they are not real people, but he always regrets it because the ending is so sad yet happy.

The ending credits roll by. "They say that the whole story is about Carl's journey to heaven," Tubbo mentions. "To his afterlife."

"Well shit," Wilbur swears. "Good movie. What did you think, Tommy?"

Tommy stares at the screen, blankly. Sadness is an emotion he is taught against, yet he enjoys the movie because of it. "It was alright," because he won't admit that he will watch it over and over again with Dream.

Tommy then stands after they dissolve into small chatter after the movie. "I guess I'll go home, then."

"It's getting dark, Techno and I can drop you off if you like," Wilbur offers.

"It's okay, I think I'll just take the bus."

Wilbur frowns, seeming to disagree with the idea. But lately, Tommy notices he will back off if Tommy wants him to. "Okay then," he says unsurely.

Tommy is relieved because he isn't looking forward to another argument with the man. They always do, but he knows that their conversations without fighting so much, can be quite enjoyable.

"I can come," Tubbo stretches.

"Tubbo," Techno stops him. "Phil wants you in his office, to discuss..."

"Oh, alright." The brown-haired boy interrupts him quickly and leaves with a promise he'll stop by the bakery soon, and makes Tommy promise to catch up with him later. Wilbur had offered Tommy to meet the man on their drive to his house, but Tommy doesn't want to interrupt the busy man in the middle of a meeting and leave a bad impression.

Tommy watches the retreating figure carefully before he grabs the DVD and leaves.

The night steadily approaches as he reaches outside. He waits at a bus stop, his hood over his head, and his hands locked in his pockets. He will go home to Dream, who will have dinner ready, and they will speak about their days while watching another movie.

Sometimes, in moments of calmness, Tommy allows himself to relax. To breathe the night air in and let the gust of wind rustle his hair without worry. He allows himself to ignore his teachings and does not glance up and down the street three times over. He does not study the faces of the bus and he does not track every person he sees.

When he does, Tommy can feel normal for a few moments. In those few moments, between the sound of the birds and the gust of wind, Tommy can feel free.

He watches the apartment complex.

A gun tucked carefully in his suit and a knife in his back pocket.

He is One. He is prepared to die tonight.

He glances up at the white moon, for the last time, and sighs.

Tonight, he will be free.

Chapter End Notes

thank you everyone for the nice comments! i loved reading them all and they helped me push this chapter out super early.

hope you enjoyed the chapter :)) much more to come!

(leave kudos and comments if you can - they help me update a little faster! <3)

Experiments

Chapter Summary

He is named after a god who killed villains and centaurs. Whom killed the Minotaur to save the children. Theseus was determined, strong, and fearless.

Tommy realizes he hates his name now, more than ever. He is glad to be called Tommy because he doesn't believe that he deserves the title of a courageous god.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy hears another voice in his apartment, and he is Sixteen again.

He grabs the knife strapped around his leg and straightens his back. Without hesitation, he shoves the door open and charges into the living room.

Dream is there, and a person with a black stealth suit is bound in thick rope next to him. He sits on a chair and Tommy rushes into the room with his stare blank and his knife flashing to reveal the sharp blade which he sharpens every morning.

"Dream," Tommy states stiffly and the assassin in him runs through his veins.

Dream watches Tommy before he stares back at the boy tied in ropes. He is from The Academy; he notes because the look of him is enough evidence to know.

"Who are you?" Dream questions slowly and grabs a gun.

The boy gulps, but his face is stoic. "One."

"And why might you be here?" Dream cocks his gun and points it at the boy's temple with no thought. He will kill him, and then they will run because they know The Academy is on their tail and they can no longer stay here.

Tommy notes the inner assassin on Dream's bruised face. One had gotten a clean punch on him, yet Dream is faster, and likely took him down in a matter of moments.

"I was given the task to bring you back," One states, before adding. "And Theseus."

Dream inches the gun closer. "Don't fucking look at him."

One stares away.

"For someone who's Graduated, you sure do value connection," he says. "Although we are taught against it."

Dream is done playing nice. Tommy would feel sorry for the kid if he hadn't come into their apartment to take them back.

"Give me one good reason," Dream says with a mix of cold ice and fire. "One good reason, why I

shouldn't kill you now."

"I'm here for another reason," One interjects. "Sapnap wanted to send you a message."

Dream's gun lowers, and Tommy's eyes widen.

"Sapnap?" Tommy mutters. "You're fucking joking."

"I'm not, Theseus," One has a lot of drive to grin with a gun to his head. *A lot*, considering the gun belongs to Dream, The Academy's best assassin. "I'm Curtis. I was in your class."

Tommy remembers his name. A second later, he recalls a tempered boy who was one of the larger, taller figures in the class. He remembers the exact boy in front of him, causing fights and receiving many extra bruises from the Teachers.

"What did I just fucking tell you?" Dream spits. "Eyes on me."

One's flicker to Theseus quickly, but they return to Dream once again.

"Tell me Sapnap's message," Dream growls.

"You'll kill me anyway," One – Curtis – sighs.

"I'll consider," Dream says, and although he knows Curtis was forced into this predicament, the kid could have done anything if Dream was unaware. His mind rotates with possibilities that if he hadn't been so careful or aware, their fate could have been slightly different. "I have a gun, Curtis. My friend Theseus here has a knife. I wouldn't be so cocky if I was you."

Curtis complies. "He told me to say that he's getting out. He has a plan, and it will happen soon."

"I've known you for ten minutes kid," Dream lowers the gun though, but he is on high alert and will shoot him through the head if he tries anything. "Five of them, you were attempting to take me down. I don't trust a word out of your mouth."

Tommy is silent throughout the whole discussion. Maybe because he is Sixteen now, and Sixteen is silent and watching. Sixteen won't speak unless spoken to.

"The Academy doesn't know your location. They sent me to Northern California, but Sapnap had told me the real location of your whereabouts to pass the message."

"He's a fucking idiot," Dream mutters and sighs loudly, unimpressed. Because there is always the possibility Curtis has been tracked or followed.

"Don't worry," Curtis sighs. "I took the tracker out and deposited it in another location. I made sure I wasn't followed; I'm prepared to die tonight."

Tommy eyes Curtis carefully. His words are nonchalant, and his face is passive as he has accepted his fate of death. He is sixteen now, and he is already content with leaving this world.

"Sapnap knew that you weren't going to believe me. So, he told me to tell you '*Hotter than the Sahara and colder than the Arabian night*' to confirm it."

Tommy thinks of the message. He knows of Sapnap's final exam before Graduation, located in Sahara. His missions were located all around the world, so it may hint at a mission in Saudi Arabia. Tommy doesn't fully understand it, but Dream does, nodding slowly,

“Okay,” he says. “Okay.”

“The Academy has imposed higher restrictions since you’ve left. They’re training the students harder, hoping one of them can live up to be a fourth.”

Tommy visibly flinches.

Curtis notices. With the training he is given, there is no way he doesn’t. “Since you never graduated, they consider it a failure to succeed. If you come back, Theseus, they’ll kill you. They only want Dream alive.”

Tommy gulps and lowers his knife. He does not share any emotion, not to an analyzing Curtis, or to a concerned Dream whose eyes scan him quickly. He should have expected this. Because Dream, Sapnap, and George are valued, they mean something to the Headmaster.

Tommy could never be their fourth. He wasn't ever enough.

“Can you tell us more, Curtis?” Dream questions. “We will let you go.”

Curtis laughs. “You’re joking. They expect you to kill me. If you don’t, they’ll do it themselves.”

“I won’t kill you,” Dream shakes his head, and his words are lighter than before. He has gotten the information needed; he just wants more. “We kill because The Academy told us to. I have no reason to not let you go.”

“If I go back, they’ll torture me until I tell them everything. I’ve spoken my fate after I took the tracking device out. I’m dead.”

“Curtis,” Tommy finally speaks. “You can live.”

“I don’t want to,” Curtis shakes his head. He is not One. He is not an assassin of The Academy. He is just a boy who has been taken away from his family and forced to kill for life.

He is like Dream and Tommy. He is like Sapnap and George, and the rest of the students in The Academy.

Curtis is just a boy, yet he is willing to die sixteen years young.

“I have a friend,” Dream considers his thought. “He kills for the good. He will be willing to take you under his wing, to help you out. Proper accommodation and you will be free. He will keep you safe.”

“I don’t understand why you’re so willing to let me go,” Because it’s unfathomable to Curtis why a man who is so capable of killing, will not. “You shouldn’t.”

“You can’t go back, you’ll be dead otherwise,” Dream tells him. “Theseus, untie him.”

Tommy does, reaching for Curtis’ ropes behind his chair. They are knotted perfectly; Dream hasn’t lost his touch. But they are also taught how to untie them, and considering Tommy has two working arms, he completes it very quickly. The ropes drop, and Curtis stands finally.

He’s slightly taller than Tommy, shorter than Dream. He stares at his hands as if he’s unaware of what to do with them. Tommy eyes his leg and notices the fresh stitches applied. He isn’t lying about removing the device from inside his skin.

“Do you actually trust me?” Curtis questions suspiciously.

Dream corrects him because he does not trust anyone but three people. “I know you won’t go back.” He leaves to give Curtis another set of clothes.

Curtis turns to Tommy. “Why?”

“Why what?”

Curtis pulls his charcoal hair. “I don’t have fucking time. Will he follow me? They told me, they told me that I’ll be killed here or there. I have to leave.”

“Curtis,” Tommy sighs and grabs his arm. Curtis will twist it back out of reflex, but Tommy expects it, and his grip tightens. “Dream will give you a future. Take it.”

“Theseus, I can’t fucking live. I came here, prepared to die. I can’t go on.”

Tommy knows he’s made a decision. Curtis edges towards the door, but before, Tommy stops him. “Curtis, you deserve to live. I hope you know that.”

“Theseus—”

“I go by Tommy now.”

Curtis stops and turns slowly. “I went by Eryn. But another boy had the same name, so they changed mine.”

Tommy blinks. “You remember?”

“Our names are from birth,” Curtis sighs. “It’s a part of us, they could never take away.” Tommy wants to know how he knows this information. They are given names to be rarely used, as well as their numbers.

“Eryn,” Tommy says lightly. “You have a choice now.”

Eryn smiles. “I know.” He grabs the door handle and pulls it open.

Tommy watches him hesitate. “Thank you, Tommy.” He wonders if, in another life, they’d be friends.

Eryn eventually leaves. Dream returns, but he does not come back with a set of clothes. Tommy stares at him, numbly.

“We let him go.”

Dream nods his head, and stares at the seat One – Curtis – *Eryn* had been sitting in. “I left him with his own choice to stay because he’s lived without having any.”

“He’ll die,” Tommy says plainly because Eryn had liked the thought of death.

“So, we hope, he doesn’t. We can hope someone stops him, and that he finds someone.” Dream slowly wraps his arms around Tommy, and he leans into the touch. “It’s been a long night.”

Tommy forgets how to feel. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep tonight.”

“I’ll be with you,” Dream doesn’t offer it, because it’s already a truth between the boys that Dream will stay with Tommy whenever he needs him.

“I could never be your fourth,” Tommy sighs. “Even now, and to think I even had a chance.” To think that he had hope, he could.

“I don’t want you to,” Dream cuts him off. “I just want you to be Tommy.”

They fall asleep. And although Tommy has learned through life lessons, that hope leads to nowhere; that hope leads to crumbling expectations that prove true gullibility, he still hopes that Eryn is free.

The moon watches him.

He smiles. He lays on a park bench and watches the stars.

“Hey, is that a kid?”

He freezes.

“Are you okay, dear?”

Hotter than the Sahara and colder than the Arabian night.

He wonders if Dream has gotten his message.

It doesn’t matter if he hasn’t. Sapnap is tired of waiting.

He is named after a god who killed villains and centaurs. Whom killed the Minotaur to save the children. Theseus was determined, strong, and fearless.

Tommy realizes he hates his name now, more than ever. He is glad to be called Tommy because he doesn't believe that he deserves the title of a courageous god.

"Your parents must have liked Greek mythology," Dream comments. "I'm still surprised you didn't know."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Tommy grumbles.

"I thought it was obvious that The Academy hadn't given us our names," Dream flicks his cheek and stands up. They reflect on the night before, that following morning.

"But they stripped everything from us before," Tommy complains, standing up with Dream to head to the kitchen. "I assumed the names came along with it, and they provided new ones."

"It was one thing they couldn't take away. They likely couldn't risk us remembering, as it would lead to more memories reappearing." Dream explains and Tommy understands. "Don't think about it too much."

Tommy still does. "Never call me Theseus again." He says with no room for objective, his voice stiff and hard.

Dream turns to him and raises an eyebrow. "Okay. I wasn't going to, anyway."

Tommy doesn't want the name that his parents had given him. The name that was forced on himself by the people who had given him up. "Thank you."

Dream ruffles his hair and tells him to sit down. He prepares breakfast alone today, so they do not have a repeat of the day before and so that Tommy's hand can heal fully before he picks up a kitchen knife again.

"Shouldn't we leave?" Tommy asks after quietness. He buries his head in his arms, in exhaustion. "If they're sending Er-Curtis, they'll be sending more for us."

"I considered it," Dream states. "But if Sapnap is planning to leave, then we have to be somewhere he knows."

"What about George? I'm surprised if he knew Sapnap wanted to send a message along, that he did not."

"Gogy is fine," Dream pauses cracking eggs into the pan, as he ponders before he replies. "Sapnap will establish the plan, George will allow him to lead. Although..."

"Although what?"

Dream takes out the salt and pepper and responds nonchalantly. "Quackity had already started a plan to free them. It will alter a few things, to what he had been planning."

"What the fuck?" Tommy yells. "You're telling me now?"

"Chill kid," Dream rolls his eyes. "I was going to tell you last night."

"Fine, but you better not be keeping anything else."

Dream continues. "He is planning a meeting day, so I can go over details about The Academy with his colleagues. I promise I'll explain it all, over breakfast." Tommy trusts Dream. He will tell him. "He asked me to take you."

"I'll come," Tommy offers.

"I don't think you should."

"If it can help them, then I will," He doesn't want anyone to end up like Eryn. Lost and trapped. He wants them to be free like he is. Or at least, freer than he is now.

"Okay then," Dream places bread in the toaster and flips the eggs on the pan. "If you want to."

"I do."

Later, over breakfast, Dream explains how Quackity is aware of a man who is looking to take down The Academy, to bring justice for his wife. He will involve the police, and the children will be arrested. If his plan works accordingly, then Dream and Tommy may also be caught in the crossfire.

Tommy doesn't know how he will be powerful enough. The Academy isn't an easy target. Dream doesn't know either. But regardless, if Quackity is willing to help out and bring a future to those kids, then he'll do anything he can to help.

"Eryn said they implemented tougher restrictions and classes," Tommy says with his mouth full of egg. "I wonder how Sapnap will figure out how to escape,"

Dream rubs his chin. "I have a couple of thoughts."

"What?"

"There was a particular reason Sapnap and George wanted to stay behind – they never told me why, though. But there were things in the building, that once destroyed, would help us out. The white room hadn't been used by other schools and wasn't exactly the easiest thing to build as it had to be soundproof and had to be in perfect condition to work properly."

"So, you're saying," Tommy plays with his fork. "That he's planning to destroy The Academy? They're going to take it down?"

Dream nods his head. "Then they'll relocate, into a smaller place where the students will be. If this is Sapnap's plan, then it might just help Quackity."

Dream continues. "Eryn's message was a clear indicator of it too," Dream glances at Tommy. "During Sapnap's final exam, he had... lit a couple of things on fire. He told me afterward that he was so close to the flame, that it was hotter than the temperature of the desert itself. Although I haven't quite figured out what he means about the Saudi Arabian nights."

"How did you know Curtis wasn't lying?"

"Sapnap had told me, that if we were in trouble that something like that was going to be a code word. In this case, he gave it to him."

Tommy nods his head, "So Sapnap's going to burn the place to the fucking ground?"

"I hope so."

They lapse into silence.

"That wasn't the only thing the kid said," Dream says lowly, and Tommy almost misses it. "And I don't want you to worry about that, we'll keep you safe."

Tommy doesn't want to tell Dream how he feels about the whole 'finding a new fourth' thing. He knows that if he is found, he will be found dead while Dream will be left alive. But it isn't that that has bugged him. It's his knowledge, that he was never seen as their fourth. He was never good enough.

"I don't want to talk about this," Tommy stands up, with his plate.

"Tommy," Dream stresses. "You didn't want to talk about the nightmares, so I let you. And with the situation at the gas station, I let it slide because you asked. But if you're caught up about not being our fourth – then you can talk to me about it."

Tommy ignores him and walks to the dishwasher. He sighs. "Well, I don't want to talk about it with you. It's nothing."

"It is something if this is your reaction."

"Drop it," And Tommy turns to leave. His arms itch and he desperately wants to scrub his body until he can't feel the dirt and past on it anymore. "I'm heading out."

"Tommy!" Dream calls but Tommy slams the door.

He wasn't always going to be their fourth.

Until he is.

They prod him with needles and put him to sleep. When he dreams, he lays on a grassy field and watches the clouds. People are around him, and they are unrecognizable. But he is there with him and feels something for the first time.

He wakes up attached to wires and machines.

He is startled sometimes, and when he wakes up struggling, they put him to sleep again. He awakes calmer, forcefully.

"Don't worry Sixteen," They whisper when they think he is asleep. "You will soon be their fourth."

There is a reason why Theseus has long scars on his legs and arms. They are not from missions or the punishments of The Academy.

The first time, they give him a sedative that makes him forget. They fumble a few times, and Theseus can remember being taken to a glassy room and poked until all his skin burns. The drug they give him also manages to assist in forgetting the dead faces of his missions. He desperately drinks every last drop.

He does not tell anyone that the drugs assist him in forgetting the faces of the people he kills. The

Academy makes them tough, and Theseus is weak if he cannot endure his missions. Instead, he allows them to force him to drink it, for him to forget.

All Theseus' scars and marks have a story. The one under his locks of hair is when a boy in his class had used a knife in a hand-to-hand spar. The burns on his wrist, by his number, are from the punishments he faced when they first disciplined him. It is the first-ever pain he feels.

Theseus' long scars on his legs and arms are from a failed attempt to make him like Sapnap, George, and Dream. He says that Dream and he are not blood-related, yet he probably has his blood inside of him during one of their experiments to make him as perfect as they are.

One day, their experiments stop. They do not give Tommy the drug anymore. He forever forgets the faces, and Sapnap thinks it's because he is repressing trauma as he is so young during his first mission.

However, he begins to remember the experiments. The needles and the wires poked into him. The knives that cut into his skin, and people with white lab coats who stared at him with no remorse.

They fail.

And Theseus will live on as their failed fourth.

Tommy calls Tubbo.

"Hey man,"

"*Tommy!*" Tubbo shouts and Tommy pulls his phone away from his ear to avoid deafness.

"*What's up, big man?*"

"I'm at the park," He says plainly. "Do you want to hang out?" Anything to get away from his memories he wants to avoid and the conversation waiting for him back at the apartment.

"*I'm a bit busy right now, big man,*" Tubbo exhales. "*Are you okay?*"

Tommy does not want himself to be vulnerable. "It's okay, I just needed to... be with someone right now."

"*I'll call someone. The park by the bakery, yeah? Don't worry!*"

"Yeah," Tommy says quietly, but Tubbo has already cut the call. He sits on the grassy field and stares into the air, lonely. It's a sight of his dreams, where he would go when they put him to sleep. A grassy field under a light blue sky and white clouds. There is a reason why Tommy's favorite color is blue.

He almost dips his eyes closed for a moment, but he hears a noise approaching him and he is aware once again. The situation at the apartment is a reminder to be on high alert all the time. If Dream

had not been home, and if he hadn't noticed a weird noise coming from inside, then he could have been dead.

A figure sits next to him. Their long legs and light sighs tell him that it is Wilbur without needing to look up.

"Tubbo said you wanted someone to talk to."

"Not talk," Tommy refuses because he feels so tired when he must. He's not going to cuss Wilbur out or complain that this is Tubbo's choice. Instead, he bathes in the company for how long it lasts.

"That's alright," Wilbur inhales the air. "Look at that cloud. Looks like a kettle."

Tommy opens one eye. "No, it fucking doesn't."

Wilbur deflates.

"It looks like a cat." Tommy glances at him. "You're blind as hell."

Wilbur smiles softly. His brown hair hints that he had been sleeping in all day, but Tommy wakes up at six, so anything past eight is sleeping too long for him. He wears the same red hoodie with white words that he usually wears, but it's rolled up to his sleeves. He has a white collared shirt underneath, and Tommy knows that if he cared about his fashion style a bit more, then he'd go to him for advice.

"I usually wear glasses," Wilbur says.

"Oh," Tommy glances at him. "They help you see shit?"

Wilbur laughs loudly. "Yes, Tommy, that's what they do."

No one at The Academy wore glasses, because their eyesight had to be perfect, to be perfect assassins. They are tested monthly.

"One of my brothers is colorblind," Tommy explains. "He didn't have glasses though."

"Dream?" Wilbur questions.

"No, another one."

"I guess they help, but they don't fully reveal the color to one's eye."

Tommy nods his head slowly.

"Tell me about him," Wilbur then offers, pulling his brown hair back. It bounces forward again.

"Wilbur—" Tommy doesn't want him to dig for more information.

"No, no, it's not like that," he stammers quickly. "You just, never really smile, and you did when you spoke about him. He's someone very important to you."

"Yeah," Tommy looks back at the sky. He keeps his demeanor strict because he doesn't want Wilbur to notice him so vulnerable. "He was smarter than all of us. Really fucking smart, he kept information in really well and could recite facts from the back of his hand."

Wilbur looks impressed. "You said 'was'?"

Tommy frowns. “No, he isn’t dead. I just haven’t seen him in a while.”

“Okay,” Wilbur nods his head. “Tell me about what he was good at.”

Tommy doesn’t know why he listens, but he does. “He was fucking good at geography. We would show him a random picture in the world, and he’d be able to locate the country immediately. He could do America states as well, and sometimes cities.” Tommy doesn’t disclose the information that they did it in real life too. Dream wouldn’t tell him the location of the mission, and when they arrived, George would guess by staring around.

Sapnap and he was always baffled when they came back, Dream admitting that George had guessed correctly.

“He sounds cool,” Wilbur smiles. “Thanks for telling me about him.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders.

“Do you want to tell me – you don’t have to – why you called Tubbo? He had gotten quite scared that you weren’t okay.”

“Oh,” Tommy bites his tongue. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy doesn’t know why Wilbur is being so gentle and nice. He’s calm and nice, which is not like their swearing competitions and constant fights. “Did you get into a fight with your brother?”

“How did you know?”

“Usually, when Techno pisses me off, I leave the house too,” Wilbur says. “I get away from my family because it’s nice to talk to someone else sometimes.”

“I don’t like answering questions. Dream asks me too many,” Tommy pulls his legs to his chest. “He says I need to talk to him when I’m perfectly content of keeping it to myself.”

“He cares about you, Tommy. I don’t think you can blame him for that.”

“Well, I never asked him to,” he grumbles.

“But he does. It’s unconditional, and he wants to make sure you’re okay,” Wilbur keeps his eyes on the boy, but Tommy stares at the grass. “And if you talk to him, he’ll feel a bit better because he knows of what’s going on.”

Tommy knows Wilbur is right.

“You should talk to him. Talk to someone, at least. Because if you’re thinking about it, or worrying about it, then he will help you figure things out.”

“Okay,” Tommy sighs.

“I’ll walk you back to your apartment,” Wilbur stands up and gives the younger boy an arm out to stand. “Let’s go.” Tommy doesn’t need Wilbur here to walk him. He’s capable on his own. But maybe he just doesn’t want to admit it aloud that it’s nice that the man is here, with no judgment, and speaks to him like they’ve been friends for a while. Even if they’ve known each other for a month or so.

“Thanks, Wilbur,”

“No problem, kid. You can talk to me, or Tubbo. Even Techno.”

“I’m not a kid,” Tommy mutters. “And fuck no, I’m not speaking to your brother voluntarily.”

“He’s grown a liking to you, ever since he’s found out about your mythology interest.” And Tommy won’t admit he brightens at that. “You should come around sometime soon.”

“You’re so fucking weird,” Tommy mutters and Wilbur raises his hands behind his head to lean on them.

“I don’t think I am.”

“I disagree.”

Wilbur pats his shoulder when they arrive at his apartment. “Have fun, remember what I told you.”

“Yeah, yeah, fuck off.” But for the first time, in a long time, Tommy smiles at Wilbur.

Chapter End Notes

AHHH i've updated three days in a row
i'm feeling very inspired but i'll tone down the daily updates for now. thank you so so
much for reading!!

leave kudos and comments if you can <3
(if you're feeling a bit confused, ask me and i'll respond!)

Arson

Chapter Summary

“I don’t know why you give a shit about school, it’s pointless.”

“It’s not pointless,” Wilbur interjects but Tubbo rolls his eyes.

“Says the dropout,” he deadpans.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Theseus’ mind is blank when he takes down his classmate. He is Four and does not stand a chance as Theseus flips him to the ground and punches him into the stomach. The Teacher yells, and Theseus stands up and watches as Four struggles to stand.

Theseus feels the eyes of people with clipboards and his Instructors’ eyes on him. He ignores them and stands back in line.

After class, they take him back to the glassy room. He is prodded with wires again, and he stares at the unnatural fluids reaching his body. He is not allowed to speak, and instead, he breathes. He hears the monitor next to him buzzing, and as the lab-coated people scribble onto their clipboards.

Theseus waits patiently. He is not expecting the Headmaster to walk in.

Their presence is rare. They stare at Theseus with calculating eyes, and Theseus only stares back, blankly.

“Please leave Sixteen and I for a moment,” They demand, and the lab-coated people leave in an instant. Theseus attempts to hide his discomfort as they carefully walk into the room.

“Sixteen.” They speak.

The students are taught to analyze facial language and observe every movement in a room they are in. Yet, it is impossible to read the Headmaster as they face says nothing.

“Sir,” Theseus responds clearly.

They sigh. “Did I give you my permission to speak?”

Theseus stares and does not open his mouth again.

“I expected my students to be disciplined, especially at your stage, Sixteen. We wouldn’t want the Graduates’ fourth being undisciplined, would we now?”

Theseus gulps. The Headmaster’s gaze is sharp and he must stare away, at the white room behind him, to resolve the tension that consumes his body when he stares at the eyes of whiteness.

“Sixteen, if you cannot be their fourth, that what are you? What is your worth?” They ask for no response. “We expect great things from all our students, yet Dream, Sapnap, and George are our

most honored because of their high capabilities and abilities. Yet Sixteen, you are not fully disciplined and do not hold the strength they did when they were your level,”

They continue. “The testing will continue until you are perfect. If you cannot reach the stage, we must. Our students are remarkable, many of them are. But we require perfection. You, Sixteen, are not perfect. And if you cannot reach this, then what are you to us?”

Theseus stares.

“Then you are nothing. You are replaceable. You are worthless, Sixteen.”

Theseus is not enough.

Tommy reaches the apartment floor and hesitates.

He glances back at the elevator door. Wilbur’s words ring through his mind, as he knows that opening up to Dream will not only help his older brother but himself. He has never spoken about the testing with anyone. Not to Sapnap, when he had asked why he had been missing from a couple of classes, or with George when he expressed concern when Tommy had not appeared at the usual meeting spot in over two days.

He knows he should speak to Dream. But he still hesitates.

Before he can turn back, a voice from the other side of the hallway shouts at him.

“Tommy?” He rushes to his side. “I was just going to look for you.”

“Dream,” he says painfully.

Dream leads him back to their apartment. There, he closes the door behind him and sits on the couch by Tommy.

“We’re going to talk,” Dream starts.

“Dream—”

“No, Tommy, we can’t put this off.” Dream’s face is stoic, and Tommy would have laughed if this wasn’t the circumstances. He turns his head, considering walking away, but he knows Dream won’t let him off so early. “We have to talk about whatever’s bothering you. I’m worried.”

“You’re Dream. You shouldn’t be worried.”

Dream rolls his eyes. “For being the top student of your class, you sure are dumb.”

“Call me ‘dumb’ to my face bitch,” Tommy says in German.

“Tommy,” Dream says in Hindi. “I know at least ten more languages than you.”

Tommy gives up because it isn't a fight he's willing to continue. “I hate you.”

“I know you don't.”

Tommy's eyes flicker away, staring blankly at the wall in front of him. “Can I go to my room now?”

“No,” Dream refuses. “Why did you come back soon?”

Tommy grumbles under his breath. “Wilbur told me to.”

Dream laughs. “And what did he say exactly?”

Tommy can't lie to Dream. Not when he's desperate struggling to avoid the emotion settling on his features. “He told me to talk to you because it will help the both of us.”

“Maybe I don't dislike the guy anymore,” Dream mutters. “But he's right. The Academy drove a message into us that we could not feel. But since we're not there anymore, and we can, then you shouldn't keep it to yourself.”

“That applies to you too,” Tommy frowns at his brother.

“I know, I know,” Dream wavers his hand in the air. “Not about me at the moment, though. Do you want to stay talking?”

Tommy sighs.

He thinks about the glassy room and lab coats. The prodding and needles grazing his skin. The hairs on his skin freeze at the memory and he desperately wants to itch his skin until all the past feelings leave.

“Hey, stop that.” Dream pushes his hands to the side. “You're scratching yourself.”

Tommy doesn't realize he's scratching himself. He drops his hands. “Sorry.”

“You said I shouldn't be worried because I'm Dream,” The older says very quietly. “It was expected of me, of all of us not to feel. I was expected to be the best, Tommy. The Headmaster had expectations for me and so did the Teachers. When they caught me joking with George once, they got angry. So, it didn't happen again, and I learned. But I'm changing because I can smile, and I can laugh, and I can ruffle your hair and annoy you without being punished or losing my reputation.”

Dream sighs. “And I do worry. Because we've left there, and I'm allowed to – and show it. You were taught to keep things to yourself and rely on yourself, but now you can rely on me and I can worry for you.”

Dream is making it harder for Tommy to admit the truth. He leans forward, his eyes gazing at the floor, desperately avoiding Dream's eyes and words.

“Look at me, kid.”

“I can't.”

“Why not?” Dream edges closer, and his breaths are cold against Tommy's skin. Tommy gulps.

"I can't," Tommy murmurs. "You'd be disappointed."

"Why would I be disappointed?" Tommy doesn't have to see Dream's face to know that he's frowning.

"Because," Tommy's voice cracks. "I could never be your fucking fourth."

The tears stain Tommy's eyes. Something inside him, snaps.

"Tommy," Dream sighs. "How many times do I have to tell you? You don't have to be your fourth. Forget what Curtis said, I don't want you to be."

"That's not- that's not-" Tommy's tears spill. "I failed, Dream."

"How, explain how."

"They tried to make me like you. They tried, and they fucking failed." Tommy cries and the tears roll down his cheek.

"Tommy," Dream says slowly, stiffening. "What do you mean?"

Tommy gulps for air. "They tried to make me like you. With tests and fucking experiments. They'd – they'd do shit to me. And put me to sleep and when I woke up, I didn't look different, but I *felt* different and–"

"Tommy," Dream whispers in disbelief. "They tested on you?"

"They tried to make me your fourth," Tommy cries. "And I failed."

Dream grabs Tommy's hands and lets him lean on him. The younger boy's chest rises and falls fast, and his breathing is all over the place as his mind is taken to the lonely nights in the glassy room as he felt disgusting and dirty. He wanted to rip the tubes and wires out desperately, but he'd get reprimanded if he did.

"Can you explain it?" Dream asks, rubbing his back slowly. He lets Tommy cry because he is sixteen and because he's allowed to – unlike what they were taught before. "Can you explain to me, what they did? Everything."

"Why?" Tommy wants to raise his hands to wipe away his teary face, but his body is trapped in between Dream's protective arms, and he can't move. He doesn't mind, though.

"I want to know," Dream says. "So I know exactly my limits when I deal with them."

Tommy bites his tongue. "At the start, it wasn't so bad. They'd put me to sleep and I'd only notice what had happened after because they drugged me."

"Drugged you?"

"It made me forget a lot. It's why I started forgetting the faces."

Dream swears under his breath. "That's why you started to remember them again. Since they can't provide it to you anymore, you're regaining your memories again. How long did this go for, Tommy?"

Tommy is silent for maybe a minute. "A couple of years."

“A couple of years?” Dream questions incredulously. “Why didn’t you tell any of us?”

“I wasn’t allowed,” Tommy sighs, closing his eyes. “And I – I wanted it to work.”

“This wasn’t right,” Dream pulls Tommy away and forces him to look into his eyes. Tommy may complain when Dream calls him a kid, but right now, Dream hasn’t felt so older. “What they did, was fucked up. The whole Academy is fucked up, but this is fucking gross.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy forces Dream’s fingers off his chin, so he can look away at his skin. He shows him the thin straight lines traveling up his arm. Dream watches closely. “I got used to it after a while.”

“Tommy…” Dream says quietly. “You shouldn’t have had to be what they wanted you to.”

“The Academy wants perfect assassins. And I wasn’t perfect.” *I’m still not*, Tommy wants to add. *And I never will be.*

“You don’t need to be perfect, none of us need to. You shouldn’t have had to go through those fucking tests to change for those disgusting people. You’re a fucking kid, not a test experiment.”

“I was to them,” Tommy says, rubbing his face. “And for once in my life, I felt useful. Because if I couldn’t be what they wanted me to be – like you guys – then at least I could be something. But I failed – I wasn’t enough.”

“You are useful, you are enough,” Dream ducks his head, and Tommy wonders why. “I’m sorry they made you feel that way.”

“I deserved it, didn’t I? I wasn’t disciplined and trained enough. You and Sapnap were much more skilled than I was at my age and George has always been the smartest. They needed me to be a fourth, and now since I can’t be it – they want to kill me.”

“I won’t let them,”

Dream’s voice breaks and he lets out a *sob*.

This is the first time Tommy has seen Dream cry. Maybe it’s the first time he has ever.

Tommy decides he doesn’t like seeing him cry because of him. “I’m sorry,” he apologizes.

“It’s not your fucking fault, I wish you could get that in the thick skull of yours,” Dream chuckles lightly, rubbing his knuckles between Tommy’s curly locks of blond hair. “Never apologize again. You’re not allowed to.”

“Oh – *oh*, okay.”

“They will, though. They can apologize one hundred fucking times, and at about a thousand, I’ll consider going easier on them.”

Tommy stares at his hands between Dream’s bulky arms circling him. Tommy suspects he does it because the older doesn’t want him to see his tears.

“You know, I say we’re not blood-related brothers sometimes when I make fun of you,” Tommy mutters. “But we have the same blood.”

“What?” Dream lifts his head and his arms loosen for a moment.

“Yeah,” Tommy laughs in between tears. “I guess we are really brothers, huh Dream.”

Dream rolls his eyes and exhales. “I can’t believe you.”

Tommy smiles. “Brothers.”

“Little danger,” Dream mutters. “Little brother.”

Tommy laughs and he finally feels a little lighter than before.

Wilbur is talking to Niki when he gets a call from Tubbo.

“We’re in.” And he ends the call in an instant.

The two words are enough for Wilbur to know. He almost rushes out of the bakery, if it isn’t for Niki pushing a bag of treats in his hand and telling him to call her later. They had been in a middle of a conversation, speaking about Tommy. Wilbur had briefly mentioned Tommy’s low mood and their conversation at the park, while Niki listened with careful consideration to cut back his hours.

“Bye Niki!” Wilbur rushes out, hearing a ‘Don’t slam the door!’ on his way out. The man isn’t quite fond of replacing the door again, and Phil is going to make him pay the next time he does, so he closes it carefully and turns to where his car is parked.

He calls Techno as he drives back to their main computer room – located in Phil’s office, or ‘Headquarters.’ They still need to find a better name for the place, but it will do for now.

“Are you with Tubbo?”

“We’re waiting for you, hurry up.”

Wilbur drums his fingers on the steering wheel impatiently as he waits for the color light to turn green. “I’d like to keep my license, thank you very much. Someone needs to drive you to get your coffee.”

“Phil refuses to start without you, get here.” And he cuts the call. Wilbur rolls his eyes, waits for a green light, and drives.

He doesn’t get there soon enough. Tubbo is sitting by the large screens, while everyone peers around him. Techno and Phil are present. So are the rest of the organization – Ranboo, Sam, Jack, and Puffy. While Phil is the current leader of the Syndicate, everyone else is here because they obtain higher ranks.

Sam assists in the background; he helps keep the location in check and is constantly advancing the surrounding technology and designs and making their suits. Jack is a trained fighter, not skilled like Techno, but he’s high up there. Puffy works with Phil quite regularly, and an often connection between other organizations and forces. Techno is Phil’s right-hand man.

Wilbur's retired. He used to work regularly, and now he assists Phil around when he can.

They make up the Syndicate, well, only a small fraction of it. They have a whole group of ex-policemen and former assassins and hitmen. Wilbur would brag if he could, about their ranks. But Phil isn't like that, and keeps everything on a down low, away from media attention and the public eye. So they can balance normal lives while working together to bring justice forward.

"You took long enough," Techno sighs loudly as Wilbur moves to stand next to Jack. "Tubbo, can you finally start?"

Tubbo glances at Phil for affirmation. Phil nods his head, and he begins.

"I've found their location," Tubbo says, typing quickly into his computer. "We couldn't find a name at first, but I've managed to pinpoint it and figure out exactly why it was so hard to trace."

"Well?" Jack furthers.

"The Academy," And everyone is silent.

"Interesting," Phil rubs his chin. "They're sworn to secrecy so it's hard to trace with the technology the police have since their name is very subtle."

"It can also be covered for a normal boarding school," Tubbo adds, swiping his finger across his mini screen, the larger screen in front of his following his movements. "I've tracked their location through satellite lookout, but these are the only available images that exist from the property."

There are three pictures of large stone walls and wiring fences. "To keep people out," Tubbo assumes.

"Or, to keep their students in," Phil frowns.

Puffy reminds them, "The slashes on the wrist of victims match with the logo of their school. They're not so sworn to secrecy with such a not-so-subtle action."

"I believe it's because no one knows of them, but each other. Since the police aren't on their tail, the marks are almost a boast to the people who do know about them – to show off the extents they go to, and what they're capable of."

"Except us," Jack adds. "Since we know, we have evidence."

"Not quite," Puffy shakes her head. "The slashes still don't prove anything. Until we brought it up with the police, they had no clue any of these organizations existed."

"Puffy's right," Phil adds. "We need proof, more evidence. Tubbo, is there anything more you could find?"

"Yes," Tubbo smiles, and rows of words appear on his screen. "Once finding their location, it wasn't so hard to find their IP and get into their databases. Although they do have sufficient firewalls, it wasn't too hard. It may take a while, but I've managed to find their first class of students."

"Wait really?" Ranboo speaks for the first time, leaning forward.

"Yeah, here." Tubbo presses a few buttons and faces appear on his screen. There are thirty in total. They all seem young. "They are ten years old here."

Some of them gasp. “That’s the age they were brought there,” Phil mutters with disgust.

Tubbo presses a few more buttons. “It’s going to take a long time to delve into the rest of the classes. I assume this class is the easiest to access because it isn’t the information that they need to keep a secret as much as the rest.

Wilbur scans the names. *Rex, Julian, Rupert, Arlo*. They all look so young. Something boils inside of Wilbur, with the thought of knowing that the following children are subjected to kill and fight for their lives.

“They’re all boys,” Sam gulps and everyone’s eyes settle on the boys as unsettling as it is. “There had to be girls.”

“Maybe they were separated?” Tubbo guesses. “If it’s a completely different location, then it may be a bit harder to find but I’ll try my best.”

“You’ve done good, Tubbo. I’m proud,” Phil acknowledges, receiving a grin from the younger boy. “We’ll take a break for today. Techno, can you come with me back to the agency? I’ll inform some of the instructors of the current standards. Puffy, I need you to contact Nevadas again. I need to be able to contact them before something happens.”

They disperse, leaving Tubbo, Ranboo and Wilbur left. The man walks up to the younger boy and leans his hands on the back of his chair. “They’re so fucking young.”

“They’re deceased,” Tubbo says softly. “The first generation of students are dead.”

Wilbur had thought the same thing too. “We’ll find out soon.”

“I’m right, Wilbur. They take pride in keeping their kills away from the public – from us. They wouldn’t showcase their best agents like this.”

“They’re ten here, I wonder how long they would be now,” Ranboo thinks.

Tubbo shrugs his shoulders and Wilbur looks at him. “We haven’t spoken in a while, Ranboo. How are you?” Ranboo is Tubbo's best friend and almost one of Phil's own since he was adopted by Puffy.

“I’m doing well. Techno’s training me now since Phil refuses any formal training. It’s going well.” Phil refuses to let anyone under eighteen participate, and Wilbur doesn’t blame him. He must be distraught knowing those kids are only ten when they’re taken to the assassination academy.

“That’s good,” Wilbur responds, nodding his head.

“How was Tommy?” Tubbo then asks.

“He's okay. He just wanted to speak about a few things.”

“Tommy?” Ranboo asks. “Ohh, is that the guy you’re friends with now? I still haven’t met him.”

“‘Cause you’re always studying,” Tubbo mutters under his breath. “I don’t know why you give a shit about school, it’s pointless.”

“It’s not pointless,” Wilbur interjects but Tubbo rolls his eyes.

“Says the dropout,” he deadpans.

“Finish your homework,” Wilbur turns to leave the room. “I’ll see you two later.”

“I hope not!” Tubbo calls before Wilbur closes the door behind him.

He is Arlo and he is twenty-two when he dies.

He hopes the flower that will be placed by his stoned grave will last before it wilts.

He wonders if Fourteen will escape this madness. He knows Fourteen is smarter and stronger than he was at his age.

He dies inside trapped in between the white, strong walls, and will be free the day they crumble.

Tommy is introduced to three new faces.

Their names are Karl, Slimecicle, and Antfrost.

Karl sticks by Quackity, and they whisper in each other’s ears. He smiles a lot and Tommy guesses it will take approximately ten seconds to take him down.

Slime’s favorite color is of Dream’s eyes. His clothes are vibrant green and so is his hair. The words that escape his mouth are confusing, yet psychological. He reminds Tommy of a boy from his class. Andre, whose words had a weird meaning behind them all.

Antfrost is stricter and his stares are solid. He talks to Dream, so Tommy assumes there must be a mutual understanding between the two, as Dream doesn’t seem so closed off and apprehensive (as he seems when he speaks to Quackity) when they speak. Antfrost wears a black uniform and his posture hints that he is trained. He will be harder to take down, but he will never be a match for Dream.

Quackity brings them to a large room, with a long table and a few chairs. Quackity sits by the head, while Antfrost, Slime, and Karl sit on one side. Dream is seated on the other side, Tommy by his side.

(“Stick with me,” Dream whispers in Arabic before they enter the room. “Swap languages so they don’t have a chance of understanding.” He then says in Russian.

Tommy nods his head.)

“I’m glad we all have gotten to meet,” Quackity says firstly. “Tommy, if you did not know, Slime here helps with administrative stuff and Antfrost is one of our lead agents. Karl here is my fiancé.”

“Not fiancé, not yet,” Karl refuses and Quackity rolls his eyes.

“We’re here to talk about the Syndicate,” Tommy has not seen Quackity so straightforward and serious before. “We’ve had a few run-ins with them before, and they’ve desperately tried to establish their position between my men and theirs, many times before. It’s safe to say, that they’re willing to take us down – but we’re not their main priority at the moment. The Academy is.”

“We have knowledge that they’ve been on this case for years,” Antfrost explains. “But inside sources have told us, that they have furthered into their research.”

“Inside research?” Dream asks. “I can’t say that does not sound questionable.”

“Sam, one of their lead inventors and constructors – he makes machinery and weapons for them has a connection to Antfrost. Sam doesn’t know Antfrost works for me.” Antfrost nods his head at Quackity’s fact.

“I believe it,” Tommy says quickly in French.

Dream glances at the boy, murmuring in Mandarin. “We’ll have to hear what they say first,” As he does, Quackity frantically glances at Slime, Karl, and Antfrost to see if they understand the unknown language. They all shake their heads.

“Lucky for us,” Quackity then says. “We have you two, so our information won’t have to be hacking into agencies and illegal databases.”

“They work for the police?” Dream raises an eyebrow. “Doesn’t sound so legal.”

“The police are on their side. They don’t work for them, but they’re in close contact,” Quackity explains. “Which isn’t so good for us, in this case,”

“How are our numbers against theirs?” Dream questions. “We’ll take them down, and then reach for The Academy before they can.”

“We’re more skilled, however, they do have larger numbers,” Quackity frowns and Antfrost nods his head. “They have an institution where they train anyone over eighteen. Although, they do not kill as we do.”

“And this is legal?” Dream raises his eyebrows but does not show any emotion.

“Not entirely,” Antfrost says. “But nothing we do is legal. Many organizations exist like us, and many of them are more illegal, while a lot of others are very tight with the police force. It varies.”

“How do you know this exactly?” Dream asks.

“The Red Banquet,” Quackity leans back and takes out a cigarette. “Many representatives from across the country come for a formal dinner to discuss business.”

Dream nods his head. “The Academy participated once. I recall being sent with our Headmaster. It was our first and last appearance.”

“Interesting,” Quackity raises an eyebrow. “Your agency was never stated in the invites.”

“We must have gone anonymously,” Dream explains and Quackity nods his head.

“Possible. Although, we never do attend. I know for a fact that the Syndicate does.”

“Is it possible we can construct an agreement with them?” Karl folds one of his legs over the other. “If they are our main obstacle before The Academy, then we can figure something out between us.”

“We’ll be working against them, not with,” Quackity tosses his lighter in the air and then lights his stick. He pinches it between his lips and dusts the front of his suit. “Phil wants to get rid of those kids, one by one. We can’t work with him on that.”

The name goes over Tommy’s head.

“How about, we convince him that we’re on his side?” Dream queries. “We’ll use him to reach The Academy. After that, we’ll go our own way.”

“That might work,” Antfrost nods his head slowly. “It’ll be enough to train our agents further and we’ll set up a connection between us to then break it.”

Quackity grins and breathes out. “See, this is why I need you people here.”

“Sapnap and George are planning an escape,” Dream then tells Quackity. “I have no clue when they’ll leave, but it will happen soon enough. Sapnap’s planning to destroy the location – blow it up I assume.”

Quackity and Karl’s eyebrows shoot up. “What the heck?”

“He’ll light it on fire,” Tommy smirks. “Sapnap’s always loved a little arson.”

“Phil will assume that they’re located at the old location. We’ll split up then, and cut our types – knowing the correct location and letting the agents free.”

“Sapnap saved the day,” Karl smiles and Tommy detects a sight in his eyes that he sees in Dream when the man speaks of George. “This might work.”

“Guess we’ll be participating in Red Banquet,” Quackity pinches the cigarette between his index finger and thumb and blow out. “Dream, I would appreciate your company. Although Antfrost is an honored fighter for us, I’d appreciate you coming along.”

“I’ll come,” Tommy presents.

Karl laughs quietly. “Tommy, you shouldn’t. The people there won’t be so pleasant,”

“It’ll be dangerous!” Slime exclaims, speaking for the first time.

Tommy frowns and between air he takes out a knife and throws it at a wall behind Quackity. The room holds their breath as the knife pieces into a painting, slicing through it, inches away from Quackity’s head.

“Was that necessary?” Dream rolls his eyes.

“I’m going,” Tommy leaves no room for hesitation. “You won’t mind extra protection, would you Big Q?”

Quackity glances at the painting behind him. “Nice throw, kid.”

“Quackity, that was expensive,” Antfrost disagrees.

“It’s fine, under five digits anyway. I’d appreciate the protection, Tommy.”

Tommy nods his head. Slime and Karl still seem slightly apprehensive, though.

Dream fills in the blanks for them. “Tommy was an agent too. He isn’t just my younger brother; we both grew up there.”

Karl gasps and Slime’s eyes widen. “Oh god, I’m sorry.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders nonchalantly and turns away. “It’s nothing.”

“We’ll go over the Red Banquet another time. If I’m not mistaken, it’s two weeks away. I’d appreciate more time, but this will have to do. Phil will be attending, as well as his son Technoblade and—”

“Wait,” Tommy stops him and gulps. “*Techno*?”

“Yes?” Quackity tilts his head. “Is there a problem, Tommy?”

Tommy feels the room closing when he remembers that Wilbur has a father called Phil – and that Techno is his son – and then everything clicks.

“Techno is Wilbur’s brother,” Tommy says. “Phil’s their father.”

“Wilbur!” Quackity laughs. “Wilbur and I go way back. Although, I have not spoken to him in a *longgg* time.”

Tommy gulps. He glances at Dream who isn’t moving yet thinking. Tommy knows what this means – he knows that Wilbur’s whole secret with his mother is that she died to The Academy – to Tommy’s former Academy. He knows that he works with his father, and they’re willing to take down a group of kids who are forced into a life they do not want and arrest them. Everything clicks, and he hates it.

Wilbur, his friend. One of his first fucking friends, and now this happens.

If Wilbur and Techno are a part of the Syndicate, Tommy wonders if Niki is a part of it too. And Tubbo. He rethinks his previous conversations and wonders if he can figure anything else.

Dream excuses himself and Tommy. “It’s been a long day,” he explains because it has. “I’ll be in tomorrow.”

They leave, and Dream’s arm does not move from an unspeaking Tommy.

“Tommy,” he voices in the car. “Tommy, can you hear me?”

“Yeah,” Tommy’s eyes dart around. “*Fuck*.”

“I know,” Dream runs a hand through his face. “This isn’t the best circumstances.”

“Nothing about this is good! I thought I fucking trusted him, but he’s so willing to arrest children. Innocent fucking children.”

“We will figure something out.” Dream sighs and Tommy wonders how the taste of disloyalty will be when he betrays Wilbur and his family. “Until then, stay away from him. Don’t speak to him.”

“I can’t,” Tommy exhales and swears in his mind for getting close to a stranger. “I have to see him at work.”

His teachings have proven him right. “I can’t believe I got fucking close to him.” He can’t forget their earlier conversation – when he had thanked, he had *smiled* at Wilbur.

“We’ll figure something out,” Because they always do, Dream reassures. “Until then, we will stop talking about this. It’s been a long day for you.”

Words ring through his ears.

Care is connection and connection is death.

Tommy won’t say they he cares about Wilbur – but they’re somewhat of friends, they talk. He wonders if The Academy is right because this connection may lead to a disaster.

Tommy does not want to know.

He is George and he loves the stars.

When he leaves, he will watch them with Dream. As the moon and starry sky stare down at them, he will embrace the freedom and future they have together.

Until then, he waits. He stands in lines and assists during lessons. He is blank-faced and cold, and no one remembers any other way. He shouts at undisciplined students and keeps an eye on everyone in the room with him. When he completes missions, he ignores the lack of company and completes his kills.

He waits for the day of their escape. He may be able to leave the grounds, for missions, but he will always return. The Headmaster will always greet him with a nod and the Teachers will always lead him through his day.

Winter approaches. The stars disappear, and the night sky gazing back at him is empty.

The walls haven’t felt so high before.

Chapter End Notes

thank you guys so so much for reading!

introduced many characters in this chapter. there won't be too many additions, but i made a list here if anyone is confused or wants to refer to it later:

The Academy: Tommy, Dream, Sapnap, George

Syndicate: Wilbur, Phil, Niki, Techno, Tubbo, Ranboo, Sam, Jack, Puffy

Las Nevadas: Quackity, Punz, Karl, Slime, Antfrost

these are the people mentioned so far. (if you've forgotten, punz was mentioned in an earlier chapter as a guard for quackity but his name wasn't stated)

if this is confusing please ask in the comments and i'll answer (without spoilers)! my biggest fear is that my work is confusing lol

anyway, leave kudos and comments if you can! (they help me update a little faster <3)

Song

Chapter Summary

“What was the training exercise?” George questions curiously.

“Simple combat,” Dream mutters staring down at his plastic spoon. “They all failed.”

Sapnap has to hold his mouth before he erupts into laughter. “Holy shit Dream, you can’t expect them to beat you.”

“I wanted them to impress me. None of them did.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They stand in line, their chins high and their backs straightened. They must not move or speak. They must listen.

“Fifteen,” Dream calls out. Fifteen steps forward, in front of the Graduate. Dream watches him carefully, his eyes boring into Fifteen. He is pale but he does not look away from the green eyes that analyze him and wait for him to blink. However, Fifteen is not weak-willed and will not resign.

Dream then takes a step back and Fifteen moves into a correct position. Theseus watches as in only a moment, Dream flips Fifteen to the floor and pins him down. Fifteen groans and cannot get back up.

Dream stands and waits for Fifteen to do so. When he does, Dream hits him and Fifteen will return in line, with a red mark on his cheek and his legs throbbing.

“Sixteen,” Dream calls and Theseus steps forward. His classmates will observe as they both stare each other down. Theseus notices the familiar glint in Dream’s eyes, and he knows that Dream will make the first move.

He does. Their staring match finishes as Dream pulls his leg up to kick Theseus’ upper body. Theseus ducks in time and raises his arm to tug Dream off balance. Dream stumbles, however, he only stands up straighter and pulls out his leg to knock Tommy onto his knees, then uses his arms to settle him on the floor in a quick sweep.

Theseus analyzes his position to expect this. Dream is always one step forward and keeps Theseus down before he can rise, and pushes his body to the floor, pinning him down with his arms. Theseus struggles, pulling his arm out to square Dream in the face, but Dream’s grip is tight and he has lost.

Dream stands up. Theseus after.

Dream hits him and Theseus returns to the line. He ignores the fatigue settling within his bones and the sting on his cheek.

The rest of his classmates finish the exercise. Some return with aching cheeks, others are crumbling on their feet.

During their lunch period, Sappnap and George join Theseus at his empty table. They have started joining his class for mealtimes, as there aren't available times for them to, due to the new classes of ten-year olds arriving. The Teachers do not question why they sit with Theseus, as he sits on the only vacant table with two seats together.

"Dream," Theseus grumbles.

George snorts and bites into the salad on his plate. Theseus stares down at his plate of the food provided; two slices of bread, a cup of yogurt, vanilla pudding, and a dry salad.

Theseus eyes the pudding on George's plate. George rolls his eyes and hands it to him.

"Thanks, Gogy,"

"I told you to stop calling me that."

"And I told you I'm not listening to you." Besides classes when he must. George cannot hold back, none of them can. Like this morning, Dream has left a nasty bruise on his left cheek.

Theseus rips open his first vanilla pudding and takes a bite. He will never get sick of them.

"You know," Sappnap says after swallowing a bite of bread. "I heard a kid from one of the new classes appears to be the new Dream. The Headmaster's got an eye on him."

"What's his name?" George questions with an eyebrow raise.

"I don't know. Might be our fifth, a few years to come."

Theseus rolls his eyes and takes another bite of his pudding. "Shut the fuck up, Sappnap. I haven't graduated yet."

"Yeah, so?" The boy smirks. "You're completing missions with us and excelling in all your classes. Well, excluding Dream's by the looks of things."

Theseus rolls his eyes. "He's a tough teacher."

"Really?" George smirks. "Are you saying Sappnap, and I aren't tough enough?"

"I did not say that."

"You implied it," Sappnap gives Theseus his pudding once he finishes both of his. He hands Sappnap his bread, which the man teases in George's face. The older rolls his eyes and shoves Sappnap away.

Then Dream enters the cafeteria hall. His eyes scan the room, his eyes lingering on the students who stare away, sporting the same bruises as Theseus. He grabs his tray, and utensils and joins Theseus' table.

The other students will watch Theseus with distaste, while others will look away in fear of being caught by the Graduates. But they all know that Theseus will be their fourth one day and that he has already completed missions with the others. To an outsider's eye, them talking and sitting together is nothing.

Yet, to them, it is everything.

Sapnap almost bursts out laughing when Dream sits next to Theseus. “You didn’t hold back, did you?”

Dream stares blankly at him, ripping open his yogurt container wordlessly. “What do you want me to say?”

“What was the training exercise?” George questions curiously.

“Simple combat,” Dream mutters staring down at his plastic spoon. “They all failed.”

Sapnap has to hold his mouth before he erupts into laughter. “Holy shit Dream, you can’t expect them to beat you.”

“I wanted them to impress me. None of them did.”

Theseus rolls his eyes and examines his pudding.

“Sapnap,” Dream frowns. “What did I tell you about giving your dessert to Theseus?”

“George did it first, I am simply a follower.”

Dream sighs and places his bread onto Theseus’ plate. “Eat and stop that.”

“Thanks,” Theseus mutters and finishes his food.

Sapnap and George finish eating their meals first and go to assist with the new ten-year-olds. It leaves Dream and Theseus alone and eating.

Theseus fills up the silence. “Sapnap said there’s a kid that they think will follow in your footsteps.”

Dream grumbles. “I’ve heard.”

“Have you trained them yet?”

“Not yet,” Dream has always taught the older students. Theseus doesn’t know why, but it’s likely because, during their final years before Graduation, they must form into the shape of a true assassin.

Theseus finally turns to Dream, after finishing his food. He doesn’t notice Dream is staring at the bruise on his face. Sapnap and George may tease him for not holding back, but it is life or death. Dream cannot be relentless or favorable for any of the students. The look that is seen in his eyes is enough for Theseus to know that he’s regretful.

They must survive The Academy. Dream may need to hit, and punch, and push him into shape but he must do it to survive.

They make a promise years ago. To survive, both of them – as well as George and Sapnap – will hold onto it. They will not die between the walls of The Academy, and they will not surrender to the life that is this. Because they are stubborn and strong-willed. They won’t let anything get in the way of future freedom.

Dream punches a hole into the bathroom wall. He still feels angry.

They are taught to keep their anger hidden and to be calm and collected. They must not show emotion because it is easy to be used against one. But Dream has also realized he's changing a lot, recently. He had attempted to ignore it at first, but it was inevitable.

Dream is angrier nowadays. He is more on edge.

Sapnap was always the spitfire. The anger of the flame, whose eyes were of fire and his hands were matches. Dream witnessed firsthand how it impacted his fighting and overall capabilities. Although it allowed him to have an extra passion and urge behind his fighting, simple taunts and mocking could anger him up, until all he could see was red.

But Dream is angry and changing. He punches the wall and almost shatters glass.

Dream has always been on top, but now, he feels like a failure. He fails to protect Tommy and forces him to endure a pain that he's kept on himself for years. Dream recalls the straight scars on his arms and asks Tommy about them. He would shrug them off and state that they were nothing.

Dream hadn't pushed enough. He hadn't done enough. So, he promises he will be more, from now on.

("It won't be easy when you leave," George says a couple of nights before they leave the walls forever. "It will be hard to adjust to change. Theseus, and yourself.

"I'll make sure we're fine."

"That's not it," George continues in a whisper. "You say it all the time, Theseus is only sixteen. He doesn't understand shit as we do. It will especially hard for him to move on, so you have to help him do so.")

Dream wraps his arms with the extra bandages he has bought the other day. He promises to be a better brother.

Brother, a word which hasn't felt so real before. He and Tommy may share the same blood – the same *something* – because of the testing, and it makes him sick. He wonders that if it has happened to Tommy, then who else had witnessed the same. The Academy wants a fourth, someone equal or better than him, Sapnap, and George. They are tired of waiting around and will make them, themselves.

Tommy wakes up soon. He stumbles into the room, rubbing his eyes. "Did you punch a hole through the fuckin' wall?"

Dream should have covered it up. "I don't know, are you hungry?"

"The fuck do you mean that you don't know?" He sits on the counter stools and buries his head into his hands. Dream won't admit that the events of the past day had gotten to him and had

released a wave of growing anger inside of him, which had been boiling for a few previous days. He won't admit that the state of the wall was the consequence.

"We can go out for breakfast," Dream ignores his question again. "Do you have a shift at the bakery?"

Tommy is silent. "I don't know. I don't know if I can trust Niki."

Dream sighs. "You don't have to trust her. But we don't know if she's a part of the Syndicate either. Once we find out more, we'll make the decision. Plus, if we're taking down The Academy, we have to get into shape again."

"I'm in shape," Tommy shows off his muscles. "See,"

Dream rolls his eyes. "I mean daily exercises. I'll admit, I'm more out of shape than I'd like to be." Dream won't mind starting again, his legs and arms jolt to perform a flip and pin someone down. His fingers twitch to hold a knife and use it. Tommy seems apprehensive though but knows that it will come eventually.

"I drove past a good breakfast bar the other day, coming back from Las Nevadas. Not any greasy food, it looked better."

"I like greasy food," Tommy complains as they leave the apartment. Dream ruffles his hair, earning a slap from the younger.

"We'll also have to change our diets. Nothing too drastic, but we'll stop eating out so much."

"Okay," Tommy says lightly, with thought. Dream is almost going to conclude that he will ask about it later, but he remembers what he had told himself the following morning.

"What's wrong?" He asks.

Tommy glances at him and frowns. "Nothing."

"Tommy," They reach his car, but Dream doesn't unlock it. "You look like you're holding back from saying something. Tell me."

"Why are you acting so weird today? Open the car," Tommy grumbles and pulls the handle. Dream doesn't want his car broken, so he does. But when they sit inside, Tommy has nowhere to go and both of them realize the predicament.

"We will tell each other everything," Dream tells the younger boy. "We made that promise yesterday." He hides things of his own, but he will tell Tommy. It will take time though – he can't throw it at once when the kid is still going through yesterday's admitting.

Tommy sighs. "I guess." Dream waits. A minute passes. "When we, when we're training again, it won't be like The Academy again, right?"

Dream furrows his eyebrows. "Elaborate."

Tommy groans. "I mean – you won't hit me, will you? If I do something wrong or if I'm not good enough."

Dream thinks that another hole will be damaged when they go back to the apartment. He'll have to call to get them both fixed, later.

“Tommy,” and he struggles to keep his voice flat. “Why would you think that? We’ve trained before. I’m not going to hit you.”

“I was just making sure!”

“I did that because I had to, not because I wanted to,” Dream sighs and closes his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

He still hates the fact that Tommy doesn’t think he’s good enough.

“You are good enough. I promise nothing will happen like that. I promise.”

“*Oh* – okay,” Tommy mutters. “Thanks,”

Dream starts driving and his fingers are white from the pressure he places on the wheel. For Tommy, his grip loosens, and he attempts to relax. It’s not easy when your kid brother thinks that you’ll hit him because he’s used to it. He hopes that one day, the teachings of their past will disappear or be forgotten.

Now, it doesn’t seem like they will. They still wake up at six sharp and trust is still a hard concept to grasp upon. But they’ll get there.

The breakfast bar is retro, and the prices are higher than Dream would usually pay for. But it’s a treat and Tommy deserves it. The two brothers enter the glass door, a checkered floor and bright yellow, blues, and reds meeting their eyes.

They take a booth in the back corner. They have a nice view of the comforting trees and sky, and Dream glances around before he picks up his menu. He scans it, noticing the basic breakfast foods of pancakes, waffles, toast, and muffins. There are juices and soft drinks as well.

“Can I get a coke?” Tommy glances up with a shit-eating grin.

“It’s seven,” Dream deadpans. “Get an orange juice. Maybe they’ll bring you the small juice boxes for children.”

Tommy pulls his arm across the table to shove him, but Dream is fast and catches it before he can. “Nice try, kid.”

A waitress comes over and Tommy orders a stack of pancakes with maple syrup and a juice. Dream has to stop him from ordering a coke and is returned with an eye roll. Dream orders a black coffee for himself and toast.

“I can’t wait to show Sapnap and George all the good food,” Tommy says once she leaves. “And I thought the puddings at The Academy were good,”

“Sapnap will be hard to show,” Dream chuckles. “He won’t like to try new food. He threw a fit once when they added more vegetables and changed the bread, remember?”

“Did he actually?” Tommy leans forward in his seat, the memory faint in his mind.

“Yeah, he was considering going on a strike.” It was all jokes though because the last time someone had attempted to go on strike – they were taken away and killed.

“Oh yeah,” Tommy laughs, as he recalls the moment. (Sapnap and him had then made a bet if George would have the same reaction to the changes as Sapnap had.

George had not, and Tommy had won the bet.)

Dream reminds Tommy of more stories as they wait for their food to arrive. Although Dream has known Tommy for his whole life (the life he started at ten), Tommy hasn't known Dream for all his. Dream was sixteen – barely a Graduate, and Tommy was ten, a small kid who kept to himself.

Then, in the middle of his conversation, Tommy cowers and swears. He slides down his seat, in what appears to be an attempt to hide.

Dream kicks him under the table. “What are you doing?”

“Wilbur,” Tommy hisses and Dream turns to see a large group enter the breakfast bar. “Why the fuck are they here?”

Dream recognizes Wilbur. There is a shorter brown-haired boy by him, and a taller one with mixed black and white hair dye. Three other guys walk behind them, all of them of similar heights.

“Stop, sit up,” Dream instructs. “Just ignore them.”

“I can't just ignore them,” Tommy hisses but he sits up, seeming uncomfortable. “They'll recognize and try and talk to me. And you told me not to – with the Syndicate thing.”

“Tommy,” Dream mutters. “You're being loud.” He doesn't mean it to say Tommy is loud and annoying – but rather that the whole room will soon be able to hear him.

Tommy switches to French quickly. “You told me to stop talking to them, Dream. And they're against Quackity.”

“I admitted that in the spur of the moment,” Dream acknowledges in Greek. “You should continue talking to them.”

“Why the fuck?” Tommy continues in Greek.

“It would be too unusual for you to stop. You talk to them a lot, almost every day. Besides this way, you'll be able to scope as much information from them as you can.”

“It's safe?” Tommy furrows his eyebrows.

“They haven't made any moves to hurt you,” Dream reassures. He swaps to Portuguese for the fun of it. “We may move with Quackity after the Red Banquet for safety. You won't have to speak with them afterward.”

Tommy deflates a little, but Dream notices. “It won't be for long, and after Sapnap and George get here – if they come before the banquet. We have to keep them safe since The Academy won't be too happy with their best-performing Graduates gone.”

Their food finally arrives. They are huge portions and Tommy marvels at the food while Dream smirks. “Look good?”

“Yeah,” and they dig in.

Dream continues with stories and occasionally asks Tommy questions as he zones off and glances off at the group on the other side of the diner. But Dream knows how to handle Tommy well, to take his mind off them. Tommy never used to be the best at paying attention, but Dream knows Tommy, better than himself at times and can remove his thoughts from the table near them.

Dream sips his black coffee. “You want a sip?”

Tommy nods his head and tries. He scowls. "I'll stick to making them, not drinking."

Dream devises. "Then you can make me coffee every morning."

"Yeah, no thanks."

"I would have never known that breakfast could be sweet," Tommy says then. "We almost missed out on this."

"Yes," Dream rolls his eyes. "The reason why we left was for your sugar addiction."

"You're a bitch," Tommy responds. "At least it wasn't a drug addiction. Although that does sound rather appetizing right now."

"You're an idiot," Before Dream finishes his statement, a brown-haired boy stops at their table with a big grin. Dream turns his head slowly while Tommy glances quickly.

"Tommy!" The kid seems shocked. His brown hair and friendliness with his brother hint to Dream that he's Tubbo. He's the only person besides Niki and Wilbur Tommy has talked about.

"Hey Tubbo," Tommy pulls his blond hair out of his eyes. He opens his mouth to say more but doesn't.

Tubbo does for him. "I texted you this morning, asking if you wanted to come with us for breakfast. What a coincidence."

"Yeah," Tommy rubs the back of his hair and glances at Dream quickly. Dream reads his expression quickly.

"Tubbo," Dream says, testing his name out slowly. "I'm Tommy's brother."

Tubbo's eyes widen. "Oh, you're Dream. It's nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too," Dream responds politely. "Tell Wilbur I've said hi." It's a subtle usher to leave.

Tubbo snorts, and an inside joke runs through the two boys. Dream will ask about it later. "Sure thing. I'll talk later, Tommy." And Tubbo retreats to his table. Dream slyly eyes them; and how the whole table has stopped talking to watch. They do not stare at Tommy, they stare at him.

Wilbur doesn't. He looks away and pretends to not notice. The pink-haired man next to him; Dream recognizes from the pictures Quackity had sent him earlier. His full name is Technoblade, and one of Phil's best agents – and his son.

Dream concludes all participants are a part of the Syndicate. Although two of them seem Tommy's age, he isn't so sure about them.

"They're staring," Tommy mutters.

Dream cleans the air. "Is there anything about Wilbur I should know?"

Tommy visibly relaxes. Slightly. "He's scared of you."

Dream nods his head once and takes another sip of his coffee. "Good."

"Whenever I mention you, he visibly shrinks," Tommy starts laughing. "It's funny as hell."

Tommy talks to him more, and Dream half listens to him, and half zones into the other table. His hearing was always the best.

“He’s Dream,” they say. “He looks like he could take you, Tech.”

“I’m not so sure about that.”

Dream snorts to himself at that remark and nods at Tommy to show he’s still listening.

“Wait so that’s the Tommy that Wilbur doesn’t stop talking about?”

“Shut up,” Wilbur grumbles. “He’s a cool kid.”

“Tubbo couldn’t find anything on either of them. Then they show up randomly, and Wilbur is right – it is a bit strange.”

“You’re defending me now?”

“No, I’m pointing it out. Maybe Phil should know.”

“You guys are ridiculous.”

“Dream?” Tommy pipes up, and Dream’s half-listening has stopped. “Are you listening?”

“They’re talking about us,” he mutters in Greek.

“Oh,” Tommy blurts, in English. “What are they saying?”

Dream stops his question. “Tommy, do you know what Tubbo’s job is? Does he have one?” One of them from the table stands up and walks to the front counter. Dream keeps an eye on them from the corner of his eye and stays speaking in Greek. “Any clue?”

“No, Wilbur’s mentioned a few times he has a job but I don’t know what it is.”

“Interesting,” Dream takes the last sip of his coffee and drops the cup on the small plate. “We’ll discuss this in the car. We’re heading to Quackity’s now, anyway.”

“Okay,” and they stand up, their eyes flickering to the man with green hair, similar to Slime’s as they pass to pay. When they get to the car, Dream identifies names to their faces.

“The green-haired guy is Sam, their tech guy. I’m assuming the rest are a part of the business - although Quackity doesn’t know any of the others.”

Tommy then blurts out, “Tubbo can’t be a part of the Syndicate.”

“Why not?”

Tommy sighs. “I haven’t trusted anyone apart from you, Sapnap and George. And I’ve been trying so hard to be fucking normal and thought I could be his friend and trust him.” Tommy isn’t saying that Tubbo isn’t a part of it, he just wishes he isn’t.

“We still don’t know for sure,” Although if Dream had to bet, he would on it. “Did you know who that other kid was? The taller one?”

Tommy shakes his head and sighs. “I have a headache.”

“We have medicine at home. Do you want to stay at the apartment or go to Q's?” Dream gives him a choice because he’s used to not getting any.

Tommy contemplates to himself. “Yeah.”

“Okay then,” And they drive off.

“Sapnap,”

He turns and meets George’s eyes.

“We’re ready. It’s time.”

Wilbur watches Dream and Tommy walk out of the diner, and his heart hurts.

It shouldn’t. He wouldn’t call it jealousy, but he wouldn’t call it *nothing* either. Techno says he’s grown a usual attachment to this kid he hasn’t known for a while – and others like Jack call him out for being so close with the child he hardly knows anything about.

But Tommy’s fun. He gets angry, but he’s also endearing at times. It reminds Wilbur of a life he never had, a brother he never got to grow up with.

Theseus was ten years old when he was taken.

When Wilbur had seen Dream and Tommy interact at the arcade or when Tommy spoke so fondly, so kind of his older brother, Wilbur won’t deny it was nothing. Maybe, he should stop denying it was jealousy as well.

He cannot remember Theseus well. When he does, it’s when he looks through old photo albums. Wilbur was fifteen when he was gone, but those years were stolen from him. Whether it was mourning over the death of his mother, or the disappearance of his younger brother – he had blocked those years out of his memory.

Phil says that Theseus was a younger version of him, even if everyone thought he was going to carry after Techno. His brown hair was styled just as Wilbur’s, and his blue eyes reflected his father. They would mess around all day, and apparently, he’d follow Wilbur around all the time.

There are things Wilbur remembers. Like Theseus refusing to leave his side or wanting their father to buy the same clothes (only smaller sizes) as his. Wilbur remembers his loud laugh and screams when he'd tickle him 'to death.'

Nowadays, Wilbur doesn't feel like himself. He feels like he's missing a part of him, that was never there at all.

He concludes that he is jealous. He's jealous of Dream because he has this cool kid brother who would do anything for him. Who fears opening up, and afraid of burdening and disappointing him. Dream is lucky to have such a passionate younger brother who has a funny sense of humor and makes Wilbur's days more bearable to live in.

So, Wilbur watches Dream and Tommy leave the store and frowns, wondering if he'd be doing the same things if Theseus were still with them. If they'd be going to the arcade or hanging out during breakfast.

He knows that he would – because Theseus was the clingiest kid ever and refused to leave his side.

Theseus could be dead – he might as well be. They've been searching for six years, and the moment that the police declared the searches off, Phil persisted to continue and raised the price of the reward if he was found.

Theseus is never found, and they learn to live on. Phil forces himself into workload and Techno is more reserved than ever.

And Wilbur waits and hopes.

Sam sits back down after walking to order extra drinks. "Tommy's Greek."

Wilbur stares away from the door. "He is?"

"I heard them speaking Greek," Sam shrugs. "Him and Dream. Wanted to know if you knew."

Tubbo raises an eyebrow. "He's never mentioned that before."

"He's a weird kid," Techno mutters. "Wilbur, you get attached to the weirdest people."

"No, I do not."

"You were the first one to speak to Ranboo – I think that speaks volumes."

Ranboo glances out and sighs. "You know what? I won't even take offense to that."

"You think you're so funny Techno," Wilbur rolls his eyes at his brother. "Besides, you've liked the kid after he mentioned his liking of Greek mythology."

"Guys," Sam interrupts. "I think we should get back on topic?"

"Right, sorry," Wilbur says as Techno nods his head. Jack looks up from his menu, and Ranboo and Tubbo stop talking to listen.

"Phil talked to us about the Red Banquet yesterday. He'll be bringing two people, one other person than Techno."

"It's usually you, isn't it?" Tubbo frowns. "Besides, those things go on for hours, no one else here has the capability of lasting that long without falling asleep."

“Speak for yourself, man,” Jack responds, puffing his chest out. “I would personally *love* to be selected as—”

“Phil will be confronting Quackity,” Sam interrupts. “I’ll be back at the Headquarters, speaking to Phil through an earpiece. Antfrost will be positioned outside for backup. It might get messy there, especially with the history of the meetings.”

“Ranboo should attend,” Techno says firmly. “He’s trained enough to hold against his own, and a little experience of these things should be good.”

The table nods their head. Even Jack, who had wanted the position himself. Ranboo seems slightly timid, but he sits up a little stronger when Techno eyes him. “Yeah, okay.”

The food arrives and they dig in straight away. As much as Wilbur and Techno bicker, they get along through similar interests, such as music and books they’ve read recently. When the food arrives, work-related issues are off the table.

Wilbur isn’t as involved in the business as everyone else is. Yet, they all bond well after knowing each other well for years – apart from Ranboo. Wilbur likes music and reading books. He doesn’t want to waste his life doing a job he isn’t as passionate about or good at as the others. He had tried it once, waking up early with Techno and training with the others. He doesn’t think he’ll go back to it again.

Sometimes, when he’s alone, he wonders if Theseus would join their business, or focus on school. Wilbur’s throat closes and his head hurts when he thinks about it. So, he stops.

When he hurts a little too much, he is reminded of Phil finally being able to take down the agency that took away their mother. To put a stop to it, and free those kids who are forced into lives they can’t control.

After breakfast, they move on with their days. Techno goes to the gym, and Ranboo and Tubbo must go to school. Jack will go back to the Headquarters with Sam and Wilbur ends up in his room with his guitar.

He strums the song and recalls a song from his past. Humming under his breath, and closing his eyes, he recalls a song his mother used to play him and Theseus.

He promises that he will never forget it.

Tommy will throw knives at the targets at the wall while he makes Dream coffee.

He will hum a familiar song under his breath as he does.

“What song is that?” Dream will ask but Tommy doesn’t know himself.

He shrugs his shoulder and Dream tastes the coffee. “This is good.”

Tommy smiles and the humming stops.

He can never finish the song because he cannot remember the ending.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!!

everything is coming together very slowly....

leave kudos and comments if you can (they help me update faster!)

Sunset

Chapter Summary

George watches the walls.

They will escape tonight.

He wonders how their first sunset free will feel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy will throw a knife and hear Sapnap whisper in his ear.

“Aim a little lower. Picture the target when you throw.”

He hears George when he practices French.

“Work on your accent – use your throat when you pronounce your r’s.”

Tommy and Dream wake up and start sparring every day. They then go on jogs, which then turn into sprints on the way back. He uses Quackity’s gym at Las Nevadas and works on his skills with a knife.

Tommy hasn’t held a gun in so long. The first time he does, Antfrost gives it to him and shows him the targets they use. He shoots them perfectly and Antfrost nods his head, expecting the good results he provides.

Tommy works on his languages to pass the time at the apartment. He and Dream develop a game, where they must not repeat the same language in a conversation.

Dream always wins.

“You should go on a walk,” Dream tells him in Spanish. “You only leave when we go on jogs and your shift at the bakery. Get some fresh air.” Tommy’s phone blows up with messages from Tubbo and Wilbur, scheduling times to hang out. He would, but there is a part of him that claws into him, and forces him to store his phone away, unable to communicate. He cannot bear the fact of betrayal or having to stand against them in a couple of weeks.

He talks to them during his shift when he must. Wilbur seems worried, but Tommy forces himself not to think about it. It is the repercussions of forming connections or beginning to care about others.

“I don’t want to,” Tommy responds in Hungarian. “I think my time outside is enough.”

Dream sighs and swaps to Mandarin. “Take a break, you’ve been training all day.” Dream does not lie, because Tommy has been either at the gym, with Big Q to discuss the Red Banquet more, or with Antfrost to practice with some of their other agents. Although Tommy does take a walk to the bakery when Dream does not drive him, himself.

“At The Academy, we trained all day,” Tommy retrieves the knives sticking from the wooden board on the opposite wall. “You know we’re used to this.”

Dream continues. In Russian, “I want you to take a break. You might not need one but you’re going to wear yourself out.” In Tommy’s other ear he hears Sapnap telling him how to improve his aim and work on throwing the weapons with his back towards the target.

“Fine” Tommy grumbles and gives up their game to speak in English again. Dream will always win everything. “After a few throws.”

“Tommy,” Dream comes up next to him and takes out a knife from the board himself. “Let’s go for a walk. Put on a coat.”

Tommy almost does not want to, but Dream leaves no room for discussion. He pulls the knives away and pulls on his red shoes. Dream comes back with his black jacket on, and a thick blue vest in his hand. “It’s cold out.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and shoves it on. They turn off the lights and leave the complex.

The two brothers walk side by side across the footpath, Tommy watching Dream as he takes a deep, long breath in, to then exhale. Tommy looks away, and the cloudy sky and lack of blue in the air. He imagines a day when Sapnap and George will walk with them. Any day soon to come, Tommy thinks, knowing the message that Eryn had passed on.

“What are you thinking about?” Dream hums, turning to him.

“Nothing,”

“You do that thing when you pinch your eyebrows and your eyes don’t concentrate,” Dream nudges his shoulder. “I can read you better than anyone else. What’s up?”

Tommy sighs at the truth. “Just thinking.”

“About...?”

“Sapnap and George. We know that they’re escaping, but we don’t know when.” Quietly, he adds. “I miss them.”

“Aww Tommy,” Dream wraps his right arm around him, and Tommy shoves him away, shouting *‘lay off man!’* “I’ll be happy to see them too. Although, we’ll have to figure out either a room coordination or one of them will have to sleep on the couch.”

“Sapnap,” Tommy says. “You and George will be sharing a room, after all.”

Dream shoves him this time and Tommy laughs. “You have a bigger room! That’s what I mean!”

“Sure,” Dream deadpans but ends up smiling lightly. They go to a café and take a back table because sitting near the middle of the store has them exposed at all angles. It’s a precaution, almost an intuition to book for the back.

“You tell me to take a break,” Tommy tells Dream, “Yet this is your fifth cup of coffee today.”

“You’re keeping count?” Dream smirks after they order.

“Yes, I am,” Tommy frowns. “Coffee is shit; I don’t know why you like it so much.”

“It tastes good,” Dream stands up. “I’m going to the bathroom. Don’t go anywhere.”

Tommy nods his head and Dream leaves. He would usually have his phone to text Tubbo when he waits – but there are two problems. He leaves it in his phone and hasn’t texted the guy back in a while. He would, but Tommy can’t put himself to text him back knowing the secret of their lives which Tubbo does not.

Unless they do. Dream mentions that Tubbo and his family had searched into him – meaning that surely, they knew something. But Dream doesn’t seem to think they know anything yet, so Tommy will conclude with that statement too. What they know is that they could not find anything, courtesy of The Academy’s strict methods to keep the identity of their students hidden. Especially the Graduates – it’ll be hard as shit for any of them to find any dirt on Dream, even his name, as they want to keep their star students away from the eyes of anyone else.

Tommy resorts to watching the room around him. He recalls a game he and George used to play.

(“Everyone has a story,” They wait at a park during the aftermath of one of their kills. “You only have to watch, to learn.”

Theseus nods his head and listens carefully.

“See that couple over there?” George nods his head at the couple who lay on a picnic rug, whispering to each other. “They’re engaged and expect a baby on the way. That’s what anyone can see; although. But the more you watch, the more you know.”

“Like?” Theseus questions.

“He’s in love. He keeps peeking at her like she’ll disappear. The woman, on the other hand, I’m not so sure about. She plays with her engagement ring like she’s nervous; as if she’s holding a couple secrets from him. She can’t meet his eye either, an easy sign of concealed secrets. Watch, the man is leaving to take a phone call.” Theseus watches. “Now she’s sitting up and checking her phone, angling her body away. She’s still playing with her ring.”

The man returns. The woman’s phone rings, and the man questions “who is that?” but she does not respond.

“We learn to analyze our opponent’s body language and read faces. But Theseus, everyone has a story.”)

Tommy watches the café carefully, and his mind recalls the memories of after or before missions when George will speak stories of the people around them. Whether they were people on vacation or the deepest things you could think of a person.

He almost hears George beside him. “*See that man outside? Tell me his story.*”

Tommy’s eyes scan the man outside. His eyes rest on a black car in his vision and perks an eyebrow at it. He looks away when Dream returns.

They eat their food once it’s ready and take a walk to the park. Dream’s reason is because, “Knife throwing isn’t the only sport you’re good at.”

“I’m good at all sports, prick.” Tommy excels at swimming and running the most. He can hold his breath underwater for a long time, which means there are fewer breathing gaps between his strokes. He’s pretty fast too, but Dream’s always been faster.

“We’ll buy a ball,” Dream tugs Tommy into a sports shop, where he grabs a soccer ball. He leaves tossing it in his hand. “Everything used to be a competition, so we’ll play for fun.”

“I know how to play for fun,” Tommy grumbles.

“Come on then,”

Dream places the ball down on the grass in front of him. He watches Tommy stand awkwardly in front of him.

“Where’re the goals?” Tommy glances around because they don’t have any. It’s a huge grassy plain, unlike that one time he played with Tubbo and there were nets on both sides. “We can use those trees over there, I guess.”

“No,” Dream denies and grins. “No points.”

Tommy crosses his hands over his chest. “Then what’s the point of this?” Dream kicks the ball, and Tommy stops it with his right foot.

“I told you, we’re playing for fun.”

Before Tommy can even think, Dream runs up to him and kicks the ball away from him. Tommy thinks fast and shoves him, an attempt to regain the ball back. But Dream dribbles the ball between his two feet, wheezing when Tommy fails to even touch the ball.

“Dream,” Tommy huffs and one of his legs stretches to regain the ball. Dream turns his body, so his back is on Tommy, and he laughs at his failure.

“C’mon kid,” Tommy can almost hear his grin. “I thought you were better than that.”

Tommy doesn’t like to be proven wrong. He rushes towards Dream, as he starts kicking the ball away, his strides wider to catch up. Dream then stops, turning his body around, so that Tommy will never access the ball. He makes it seem easy; his hand stretched out to shove Tommy when he comes close. Tommy hasn’t heard him laugh so loud in so long.

He manages to get the ball off him for a split second. He shoves the older's arm away, and kicks the ball between Dream's feet, leaning away.

Dream wheezes. “Come here, you idiot.”

Tommy doesn’t and sprints off with the ball. He kicks it forward, catching up to it again and spreading a distance between Dream. He stops by the edge of the field, and glances back at Dream, to make sure he can turn at the right time.

Dream isn’t behind him though. He looks back on the ball, to find it gone.

“Looking for something?” Dream is behind him again with a snort. “You’re shit.”

“You’ll be eating shit,” And Tommy tackles him to the floor. He rubs mud in his brother’s face, who shoves him back, groaning at Tommy for getting his clothes dirty – since he loves that jacket. They both stand up, mud caked on their jeans and their hair grassy.

“You’re a child,” Dream deadpans. And they lay in the grass to regain their breaths. Dream shoves Tommy every so moment, while his chest heaves for air.

Tommy hasn’t felt so free in a while. And although they have The Academy on their backs – he

relaxes and barks out a laugh because he can. Dream shoves him when he stands up, but he allows Tommy to rest under his bulky arm, and they make their way home together.

“I’m glad we could do that,” Dream comments. “Even if you did roll around in the mud. Take off your shoes before you step into the apartment.”

“What if I don’t want to?” Tommy asks cockily.

“Then you’ll clean it up,” Dream smiles softly and Tommy wonders when he got so used to seeing Dream so casual and peaceful. “You know, George, Sapnap and I made a bet before you and I left. They told me that they didn’t think you’d be a kid.”

“What?” Tommy asks.

“I thought they were right for some time. Because for the first couple of months, you were still Theseus. You refused to open much, and you stayed in your room for straight days.” Tommy doesn’t like that name anymore, but he understands why Dream says it in this context. “But what can I say? I’m always right.”

Tommy rolls his eyes.

“I’m glad you adjusted, Tommy, because you deserve this change,” Dream says. “You deserve to live like any other sixteen-year-old kid, so I’m glad you can now. And I know you sometimes don’t think you deserve it, but what our past was – was never our fault. I know you realize that, but I know you’re still guilty.”

“But it is okay, it’s okay to feel guilty,” Dream explains. “I’m just glad, you know?”

Tommy sighs. “You’re so weird.”

“You don’t want to admit that I’m right.”

“No, I don’t,” Tommy grumbles.

“After the Red Banquet, and Sapnap and George come and we take down The Academy – when we are truly free - you don’t have to pick up another gun or knife again. You don’t have to train and practice your languages. You don’t have to do shit anymore. If you want to, that’s okay – that’s up to you.”

Tommy’s throat closes. “It’s hard to realize we have choices now.”

“I get that,” he holds Tommy’s shoulders closer, the other arm wrapped around the soccer ball. “And I’m glad you tell me this like I want you to tell me when you have nightmares, or when you don’t feel so well. Even when you’re remembering what those shitty people did,”

“Sometimes, it makes me feel weak.”

Dream nods his head. “I feel that way too, we all will at some point. Sapnap and George when they leave – they’ll have to adjust. But they’re expecting to leave the shit behind, so they’ll adjust a little easier.”

“Where is this coming from?” Tommy questions, then.

Dream shrugs and the edges of his eyes crinkle slightly as he smiles. “I just wanted you to know.”

George watches the walls.

They will escape tonight.

He wonders how their first sunset free will feel.

Sapnap won't say he's nervous. If anything, the nerves fear him.

"Don't mess up," George tells him as if that will make him feel any better. But Sapnap doesn't need reassuring words and validation, he just must do what he's best at, following orders and completing them swiftly. He will follow their set plan and he will not mess up.

He was Eleven. He is a Graduate now. He's come far.

Sapnap is often described as the least of the three – yet today, he will show them better.

There are two parts to their plan.

Hotter than the Sahara and colder than the Arabian night. George and he use the code words, to keep their plan hidden.

Colder than the Arabian night; Sapnap recalls a rooftop during a mission. Their legs dangled from the edge, and they gazed at the moon in complete wonder. The sun had surrendered, and the full moon fell in front of them.

He remembers it was cold.

"Sapnap," And Dream tells him. "I found the file room."

Sapnap blinks. He usually isn't speechless since he's usually shouting. *A firecracker*, George used to refer to him as. "When?"

"A while ago," Dream doesn't elaborate. "I know you and George wanted to start looking for it, there's no point. They've locked it up well and it's near a corridor the Teachers usually are by."

"What did you find?" Sapnap and George have attempted to locate the room for months, now. This is the reason why Dream was never on board. "Do you know your family? Your past?"

"I didn't have enough time. I found Theseus' files, though," Dream exhales, and Sapnap knows he

has been holding something in for a long time. “Sapnap, don’t react.”

“I won’t.” The words are what Dream asks when he doesn’t want Sapnap firing up, as hard as it will seem. It isn’t news Sapnap has a temper. A close breaking point.

“I found in his files, that Theseus is our final mission. The Academy knows we’re closer to him than any other student – and they want that connection dead. Graduation wasn’t our final test, he is.”

Sapnap reacts.

“What the fuck?” Sapnap growls, and he grips onto Dream’s shirt, edging his face closer. “You better not be lying; this isn’t fucking funny.”

“Let go, I’m not.” Sapnap lets go and Dream frowns. Sapnap remembers the cold sweeping through his skin and his heart burning. “We’re planning to leave, but it has to be sooner.”

“When will it happen?”

“Theseus won’t make it to Graduation, that’s all I know.”

Sapnap grits his teeth until they hurt. “We don’t have enough time.”

“We’ll make time.” And the night is cold.

Hotter than the Sahara; and Sapnap will watch The Academy burn in flames and satisfy his heart. His fingers have twitched for years, and finally, he can complete it fully. He will feel the heat of the Sahara again, but he will close his eyes near the flames.

Sapnap blinks. The heat becomes a coolness of the room.

George stands in front of him. “Sapnap,” he breathes.

“George,” And the night has started, the plan following soon after.

George reveals the gasoline. He has been collecting it for a while now.

“I said I was ready,” George smirks. They stare at each other, and then they smile.

George takes out his hand. “If this doesn’t go well, it was a good ride.”

Sapnap ignores the hand and hugs him. It is awkward, but when George unfreezes, Sapnap relaxes. “Don’t say that Gogy,”

“Don’t call me that.”

Sapnap leans away and they stare at each other silently for a dead moment. Brown eyes meet green. This may be the last time they see each other, but they both make a silent promise it won’t.

George leaves to retrieve the files. Sapnap will watch The Academy burn.

(“We’ll get those files,” Sapnap tells George. “Dream wants all of us to leave – he’ll refuse for us to stay to retrieve them.”

“It will take a long time, Sapnap. We can’t find the file room anyway – it’s guarded well, with cameras as well.”

Sapnap sighs and raises an eyebrow. “I have a plan Gogs, listen close.”)

The Academy teaches its students to have no weaknesses, yet the building itself has a big one. Wooden floorboards. Sapnap will pour gasoline and light a match. While the Teachers must escape, ensuring no child is left behind – George will find the files.

Amid the madness, they will escape.

Sapnap has gone through the chances of failure. George may not be able to escape in time, or the Teachers will find a way to put out the flames.

So, George must be quick and Sapnap’s fire must be big.

Sapnap pours the gasoline, watching the liquid sink between the cracks. He has never been so silent in his life, unscrewing caps and carrying the large containers. The smell is worse, what is worse is staying longer than they must.

He hopes George has found the file room. He hopes he can retrieve the files. It won’t be an easy job for either of them. Dream had described inside of the room, to be an eruption of chaos. Papers and boxes everywhere. George will retrieve his, Sapnap, Dream, and Theseus’ files. They complete what Dream couldn’t.

(“Why can’t you come?” Dream asks for the last time.

“If we all leave at once, then The Academy is more likely to target and find us. George and I will come in our own time.”

“There’s another reason, isn’t there?”

Sapnap nods his head.

Dream sighs. “Very well. Be safe.”

“You know I don’t make promises,” but he does.)

Sapnap won’t use all of the gasoline. He hears noises and creaks. He awaits the worst.

He hopes he has given George enough time to find the files. He knows inside of him, he hasn’t. But *Arabian Nights* cannot fully commence until *The Sahara Desert* part has. Teachers are awake at night, and the cameras above the room will find George.

Sapnap inhales. He takes out his lighter. His fingers twitch. The match in his other hand is stiff.

Sapnap lights the match and will exhale.

“I’m ready, George,” he murmurs and throws.

(He comes into The Academy alone.

He will leave with George and will find Dream and Theseus.

When he was alone, he would say he’d watch the world burn for what they did to him. Now, he is willing to light his world on fire for them, his family.)

The Academy soars in flames. Bells ring and a siren echo through the walls. Sapnap grins and envelopes the heat of the flame before he disappears to the student dorms.

He won't let these kids die. They should be free. One day, they will. Sapnap will make sure of it.

"There's a fire!" He shouts at them. "Everyone, get out!!"

The bells chime louder, and the children wake with straight backs. Teachers rush into the room, in their sleepwear. The students file out, Sapnap will follow them fast.

The Academy is a flame when they reach outside. Sapnap glances around quickly, with a hope George has made it out. He must remain patient as the Teachers gather the students and force them into lines. He notices how pale their faces are, how they sweat, and how they seem older than ever before.

The Headmaster is seen not far away. He is holding his phone, and Sapnap witnesses it all with the flames. He stands away from the crowd, near the forest by the edge of the field. He won't be seen. They must believe he has died within the flames.

He waits for George in the spot they agree upon.

("Don't wait up for me," George instructs. "Do what you have to do, and run.")

"I won't leave you behind."

George grips his shoulders. "If I can't make it out alive, then you must.")

Sapnap waits helplessly.

Time passes too soon.

The flame is large. Sapnap holds onto the tree before he collapses. He should have started the fire before; it was too soon. George couldn't have made it out in time – he replays the scenario with the match and flame again.

He should have given George more time.

He waits longer, with hope because George has always been the smartest, and he will get out. He is *George*. Sapnap has never admitted it aloud, but he's always admired the older. He regrets never telling him.

"*Sapnap,*" A voice whispers. "*You have to go, find Dream and Theseus.*"

Sapnap is stubborn. He watches as The Academy crumbles in front of him with the lingering words of George's promise for them both to be safe.

"George," he crumbles. Deep inside him, the denial forces him to move. To know that George would want him to leave in case he was inside for a little too long.

Deep inside of him, he also knows George is no more.

He executes the rest of his plan with shaking hands and a foggy mind. Then and there, he isn't Eleven. He isn't a Graduate or assassin. He is only Sapnap, and he mourns the death of his best friend.

George would have made it out in time. He said if he saw the flames, he'd ditch the files in time.

It is Sapnap's fault, and he will leave for the both of them.

He makes it out of the walls and ducks out of the sight of cameras. There are cars and long trucks that pull onto the grounds, and he manages to rush past the eyes of others.

George would ask him sometimes, “What do you think freedom will feel like? The sight of liberty beyond the walls?”

Sapnap watches the sunrise alone and spits onto the dirt.

He doesn’t feel free, he wants to say. Nor does he feel escape.

“It *hurts*,” he sobs between gritted teeth and it does.

Chapter End Notes

uhh hey
thanks for reading!

comment and leave kudos if you can! would love to hear thoughts on this chapter :))

Blame

Chapter Summary

“I’m sorry I couldn’t do anything,” Sapnap’s eyes water again and he mutters helplessly. “The plan wasn’t safe enough; it shouldn’t have happened.”

Dream is quiet for a very long time.

“Don’t apologize.”

Sapnap glances at him.

“It’s not your fault.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy stirs at night, and his eyes blink open to see darkness.

He is Sixteen again once his eyes lock onto the figure sitting by his door and with no hesitation, he throws the knife from under his cushion, at it. He does not take a second to react, shoving his bedcovers out of the way and throwing himself towards the intruder. He growls when they catch the knife mid-air, and Tommy shoves him, for the man to stumble on the ground.

He ignores the man’s incoherent words, and he swipes the knife from the ground, ready to stab him somewhere that will make him incapable to fight back. But the figure gives up talking, using their strength to throw Tommy off him, and swipe the knife out of his grip.

Tommy rolls onto the wooden floor and hollers for Dream before the intruder can attack. The man attempts to hold his palm over his mouth, but Tommy bites him and kicks his arms away.

Dream is in the room in a matter of seconds, the door slamming against the room, a gun pressed in his hands.

“Stop!” The man shouts. “Don’t shoot!”

Tommy stops panting and struggling against the tight hold. He recognizes the voice.

Dream drops the gun. He pants, “Sapnap?”

He flickers the light on.

Sapnap drops the arms that have secured Tommy into place and pushes away from where he has pinned Tommy down. He stands in the middle of the room with his academy uniform on.

“Hey,” he greets in Greek. “Fancy meeting you guys here.”

Tommy’s chest rises and falls, and the adrenaline dims as he focuses on the new presence. *Sapnap*.

Dream still glowers at Sapnap, as if he’s a ghost. All that is heard is their heavy breathing and

tough realization.

Then Dream roars. “What the fuck were you thinking? We have a door!”

Sapnap grins and tips his head back, shaking his black, sweaty hair out of his face. “The window looked more appealing.”

“You broke into his room?!” Dream shouts incredulously. “You could have told him it was you!”

Sapnap blinks. “I did, the kid wasn’t listening.”

“I thought there was an intruder in the room!” Tommy shouts.

“I’m the victim here,” Sapnap grumbles loudly. “Theseus threw a knife at me; I almost lost my left eye.”

Dream scoffs and Tommy leaps over to Sapnap. Sapnap thinks he will fight again, but when Tommy’s arms wrap around him, instead of throwing a quick punch, Sapnap relaxes.

“Good to see you, kid,” Sapnap pulls him closer and notices his new colored hair. “Your poor hair.”

“Dream made me,” Tommy grumbles and as he moves to let go, Sapnap won’t. He pulls his hands through his blond curls, and Tommy lets him. “Do you like my piercing?”

“Yeah, it’s sick.”

Tommy grins and Dream exhales loudly beside them. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the neighbors woke up. You could have at least come at a more sensible time – not three in the morning.”

Sapnap stands up and smiles at Dream. “I know you want a hug.”

Dream does not say anything and Sapnap stands to walk to him. They stare each other down, and then, Sapnap reaches his hand out, pulling him into a hug.

Tommy sees Dream smiling faintly, concealing it quickly when Sapnap lets go to look at his face.

“How was the journey?” Dream raises both eyebrows

“Not bad,” Sapnap hesitates, and Tommy wonders why because he expects their reunion to be loud and laughs. “I–”

“Wait,” Dream stiffens. “Where is George?”

Sapnap gulps and Tommy analyses his body language to know that something has happened.

“He’s not here,” Sapnap mutters and rubs his shoes on the floor. “He couldn’t come.”

“Why not?” Dream dares him to speak. “Where is he?”

Sapnap sighs. “It’s a long story.”

They decide to talk in the living room, because of Sapnap’s confession. Dream is on edge and Tommy fears something is wrong.

Sapnap stares around the room. Tommy notices how he eyes the exits and windows, an assassin’s

intuition. Dream ends up standing, while Sapnap sits on one of the kitchen stools, and Tommy pulls himself up on the counter.

Sapnap is silent and Dream waits.

“Did you get my message?” Sapnap questions.

Tommy nods his head.

“George and I planned to burn down The Academy. A collective decision, because we realized that escaping and taking it down later was never going to be enough. We couldn’t risk the white room and other things. While I’d bring it down – George was going to locate the file room and break-in.”

Dream frowns and crosses his arms over his chest. “This is the reason why you refused to come with us?”

“Partially. I told you before; we all could never leave together. It would not be possible since they’d do everything in our power to bring us back. With this, we could leave successfully. You told us that you had found the files before, and we wanted to finish what you couldn’t.”

“Files?” Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “What files?”

Sapnap clamps his mouth shut. “You never told him?” Dream looks away from Tommy as he nods his head, and Sapnap explains for him.

“We all have files, Theseus. It states the information they took from us, the names of our family, and our past lives. Last time Dream went in, he could only find yours.”

Tommy is too shocked to correct his name.

“Tommy,” Dream corrects for him. “He goes by Tommy now.”

“Tommy,” Sapnap tests the name out and nods his head.

“Why the fuck did you not tell me?” Tommy questions Dream. “How long have you even known?”

“I was going to tell you, eventually.”

Tommy scoffs, tempted to flip him off and leave the room. Dream is all about making him open up but won’t apply the same for himself.

Sapnap continues before they will start something he doesn’t have time for. “We completed the plan a few nights ago. I’d pour the gasoline and light the place on fire. George would find the files and make it out in time for us to get out and run.”

Dream connects the dots. “Sapnap,” he hisses, and his hands make fists. “Sapnap.”

Tommy sits speechless. He cannot do anything when Dream charges at Sapnap and grips his shirt. He cannot do anything when they shout at each other, and Sapnap pushes him off. He stares away as chaos ensues and Dream crumbles and Sapnap chokes on sobs.

Dream still grips onto his shirt, tightly, while Sapnap exhales. “I waited for him, to come out. He didn’t.”

“How long?” Dream shakes him tightly, his voice louder. “How long, Sapnap?!”

“I think an hour,” Sapnap chokes. “By the time I left, the fires were all that was left.”

Dream collapses.

(Agents would say, Dream would stand strong until the end of time. However, not many people knew that George is his breaking point.)

“George is dead,” Dream’s eyes gloss over and this may be the first time they will mourn over the death of a classmate.

(Dream, at sixteen, stands with the ten other students. They are all that is left as twenty have died before him. But he does not feel or mourn. He only stares forward as his name is called.

Sapnap watches as the boy in front of him dies. He forces his hands to stop shaking and looks away. He is the first one dead, and nineteen will die after him.

Theseus kills a classmate and feels nothing. He sees blood and he must step back, for them to take the unalive student away. Soon is their final year as students of The Academy – before Graduation and only the strongest will stand near him.)

Sapnap stands quietly. “He could still be.... he could still be alive. George could have made it out.”

Dream closes his eyes and Sapnap collapses on the floor by him. “I don’t want to hope.”

“Neither do I,” Tommy stares at his hands as Sapnap says, with tears. “But I have to. For George.”

Dream cries. Tears rest on Tommy’s palms, and he does not want to admit that they are his. He hopes Sapnap’s story is false – although the older boy would never lie of instances like these. He then hopes that George had made it out later, but if Dream is on the floor crying, and Sapnap joins him – he knows that he only holds false expectancy.

“Tommy,” Dream mutters, knowing his mind is spiraling. “Get here, kid.”

He joins his brothers, on the floor. He leans on Dream’s side and lets Sapnap move beside him. For the first time in their lives, they sleep between each other’s company, George’s presence lingering in their minds.

George feels flame.

One day, he tells Theseus that he has no will to live. That he does not care about death and will accept it when it does.

George realizes then that he wants to see Dream one last time. He wants to see Sapnap and shout at him for his terrible plan. He wants to tell Theseus that he was wrong all those years ago.

George just wants to live.

Tommy wakes up in his bed and when he sees Sapnap, he falls off.

The memories rush into him, as his head knocks onto the bedside table. He swears and stands.

“Sapnap didn’t want to sleep on the couch,” Tommy’s eyes raise to Dream, who sits on the floor, and he stumbles in shock again. He’s out of it, his mind is foggy and unclear. “You, okay?”

“Yeah,” Tommy mumbles and rubs his eyes. “It wasn’t a dream, was it?”

“No,” Dream sounds resigned. “We’ll figure something out.”

“George is strong,” Tommy bargains. “He would have made it out, he’s quick enough.”

Dream sighs.

“What does Sapnap think?” Tommy digs his nails into his skin.

“Sapnap doesn’t know what he thinks, he’s tired,” Dream stands. “Bear with him, he’s not going to be himself, so we’ll give him a bit of space.”

Tommy nods his head and looks away. “Can I go back to sleep?” He asks for permission.

Dream nods his head. “You don’t have to ask,”

Tommy goes back to bed, and Dream leaves the room. He lays, staring at the ceiling before his eyes flicker to Sapnap. Tommy notices the youngness on his face, how he is twenty but does not look a day over eighteen. When his eyes look away, he wonders why this must be so hard. He’s *tired* of feeling so tired – and seeing his siblings feel the same.

George is always there. His presence is always lurking and watching. Tommy hadn’t realized it for a long time, but George cares a lot. He hides it behind his stoic faces, but gaining his loyalty is the most trust he could give to a person.

Tommy is reminded of George’s soft and reassuring words, the way he would give Tommy his puddings and sneak him food between classes, and how he was always there.

And how now, he isn’t.

Tommy sleeps.

They were all deprogrammed to forget how to feel.

Yet now, Dream's heart soars, and his heart hurts and he realizes that this is what it is. To feel, to love, to mourn.

Sapnap sits by him and stares into wonder. He figures it out too because at twenty and twenty-two, they feel hurt for the most time. Not the physical, where their skin tears and bleeds and their legs pain from the constant training and movement. Their heart burns now, cast on fire by a single match.

Even though Dream is twenty-two and mourns for the first time, he wishes he doesn't. He cannot contain the overwhelming pain and wants it driven out of him.

They can ignore the physical bruises and burns. Dream has learned control and uses it to his advantage. But he cannot control the emotion that spreads like a wildfire and continues to grow. It wraps around his thoughts and heart, and tugs.

They mourn now because they do not have a chance to later.

Not when their kid brother is hurting and going through shit himself. Not when they have the burden of the Red Banquet to attend to, and The Academy to take down. Tommy is first, Dream puts himself second. Tommy can't see him cry – or be weak, because Tommy needs someone strong to be there for him.

Dream's always cared for the kid. Always looked out for him, and desperately ignored it when Sapnap pointed it out or when George smirked. Tommy cannot have the same fate as George, neither can Sapnap.

Dream had made a promise to himself. That he will put himself in front and risk his life for his family. But since George is dead now, Dream will put more effort in. He will try until he cannot.

"Dream," Sapnap mutters and pushes his black hair behind his face. He looks less like an agent for the first time in his life. He wears Dream's clothes, grey sweatpants, and a black shirt. He keeps his white bandana on because he refuses to take it off. "I'm sorry."

Dream's eyes flicker over.

"I'm sorry I couldn't do anything," Sapnap's eyes water again and he mutters helplessly. "The plan wasn't safe enough; it shouldn't have happened."

Dream is quiet for a very long time.

"Don't apologize."

Sapnap glances at him.

"It's not your fault."

("This is your fault, Eleven," They spit in Sapnap's face with distaste. "You're out of control, you fight with your heart and not with your head. And because of you – now we all have to bear the consequences. How have you made it this far?")

Sapnap is a ball of fire. They attempt to train him, to force him into the assassin they want him to be. Sapnap remains the same and faces the consequences.

So, they shout at him, they discipline him more. They blame and shout at him because it is his fault, that he's so reckless and careless. That wildness is his nature, and this is who he is.)

Dream finds it on Sapnap's face. That he blames himself because he believes he was out for revenge and the fire inside of him was uncontrollable.

"It's not your fault, Sapnap," Dream repeats and Sapnap will listen.

Before Tommy wakes up they wipe their eyes and shove each other playfully.

"Is he alright?"

"He's gone through a lot," He has secrets as they do. "He'll tell you in his own time."

They promise that even if they hurt, and so will Tommy – they will help him to hurt a little less.

Tommy wakes up alone.

He almost pulls on his uniform to begin the day. Tommy had done that when they left, for weeks straight. He would get out of bed, stretch, and pull on his black uniform until he remembered he was not at The Academy anymore. Today is the first day in months, he thinks to do it.

He stumbles out of bed once again, scratching his arms. He notices how they're red, and scabs litter his skin. He finds himself digging his fingers into his skin, which he used to do all the time back then in his sleep.

Tommy doesn't know why he's resorting to his old habits. Everything is getting to him, and he can't let it. He must stay strong, and he can't worry Dream or have Sapnap hold more guilt than he does.

They are speaking in the kitchen when Tommy enters. They stop when they notice him.

"You were asleep for the whole day, Theseus," Sapnap snorts, before correcting himself.

“Tommy.”

“He sleeps in a lot more,” Dream mumbles to Sapnap before watching his younger brother. “We were about to have lunch.”

“Okay,” Tommy groans and rubs his eyes.

This is the first time they will eat lunch after The Academy. However, George will not be with them.

Tommy expects it to be tense and awkward. But Dream grabs the plates and spoons, while Sapnap takes the put of pasta and bread, and they talk happily. It doesn’t seem as if anything’s happened – as if last night had not happened, and Sapnap had not admitted to George’s death.

Tommy takes a seat carefully on their small table, Dream on his left and Sapnap on his right. The chair in front of him is empty but everyone ignores it. Usually, Tommy will serve for himself but when he doesn’t, Dream does for him.

“I called Niki,” he says once they start eating. “She knows you’ll be missing shifts this week.”

“Shifts?” Sapnap leans back lazily in his seat. “Where do you work, Tommy?”

“A bakery,” he mutters and stares at his food.

“Really?” Sapnap seems shocked. “Bring me free food next time.”

“I don’t think there will be a next time,” Dream sighs like he doesn’t want to have this conversation now. “The Red Banquet will happen at the end of the week. If it goes accordingly, we’ll move to Paradise to be safe.” Tommy assumes they’ve filled each other in with the Quackity situation for the time he has been asleep.

“How do you know Quackity?” Tommy then asks. “He mentions you, sometimes.”

Sapnap barks out a laugh. “We had a thing.”

“A thing?”

“I can’t go into detail.” Sapnap shrugs his shoulders.

“They dated,” Dream interrupts with an eye-roll and Tommy almost drops his fork.

“What the actual fuck?” He speaks. “You’re lying.”

“Dream,” Sapnap complains. He laughs lightly, and Tommy stares at his red-rimmed eyes and tired smile. He thinks they’re keeping their hurt from him; he knows that this is the case. They cannot be okay with this predicament – they can’t act like something hasn’t happened when something has.

“What’s on your hands, Tommy?” Dream inches closer and Tommy stills. Dream grips his hands and pulls them towards him. “What happened?”

Sapnap peers over and Tommy’s cheeks heat from being worried over. He’s had larger bruises and burns. He’s had tubes stuck to him and rub through his body. Yet, Dream will ignore the past and continue to care.

“It happens sometimes,” Tommy tries to shove his arm away. “I don’t realize it.”

Dream sighs and stands up, the chair dragging behind him as he looks for the bandages.

“He worries a lot,” Sapnap smirks. “You know, Tommy, I thought when I did see you again – I assumed you were going to be the same kid that left. I’m glad you aren’t.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He squints his eyes.

“It’s not to say anything bad – I mean that I thought you were going to refuse to adapt and change. I’m glad you had Dream with you, to be able to. ‘Cause, you may think he’s being overbearing and worrying too much, but if any other kid had scars and blistering arms – their parents would get concerned.”

“I guess we can’t relate, with the parents part.”

“I guess we can’t,” Sapnap agrees, chuckling. He nudges the boy. “But you have Dream. And me, now.” He would say George’s name afterward if he was here. Tommy feels cold again.

Dream returns and Sapnap stands to put his plate in the sink. He takes out the bandages and passes them to Tommy for him to put on himself. Tommy rolls his eyes but reflects on Sapnap’s words and complies.

“You know there’s no point doing this,” He then grumbles. “I do this absentmindedly; I can’t help it.”

“Tommy!” Tommy’s eyes turn a fraction and a knife flies his way. His arm raises and he catches it, not a single moment's hesitation.

“Sapnap!” Dream shouts, and steam will soon escape his ears from how red his face is. “What the fuck?!”

“He deserves it,” Sapnap reasons. “For last night.”

“You don’t throw a knife at him!” Dream exclaims.

“He can catch one with his eyes closed,” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “Stop being so pressed.” They shout at each other, and Tommy sits back down to eat his untouched pasta.

“You don’t throw a knife at him! He was distracted.”

“I was testing him, making sure he kept his training up.”

“And?!”

“I can throw more knives; Tommy won’t give a single fuck.” Tommy hums loudly to agree.

Dream collapses on the seat next to him, and grumbles. “Put the plates in the dishwasher, you fuck.”

Sapnap barks out a laugh.

Tommy sees George seated in front of him. George listens to their banter and smiles.

Tommy blinks, and he’s gone.

Number Sixteen. *Theseus*.

Phil stares into his eyes. Blue, as the color of his sky during his birth. The clouds had disappeared, and the world had welcomed him through another bright day.

Blue eyes, alike to the color of his own.

He can't look away. He sees the kid staring at the camera blankly, the emotion and life driven out of him. He has a long scar across his forehead, and the same brown curls he remembers so well.

Suddenly, Phil is very angry. This is his son, once a boy, and now an assassin. He seems as if he hasn't smiled in years, and he knows he hasn't experienced the love and warmth that he should have.

The anger that surges within him, is painful. Phil can't help but feel like a failure, for allowing his son to end up this way.

Phil will not make the same mistake twice.

He will bring Theseus home.

As Tommy throws knives at the wall, he asks Dream, "Why did you never tell me about the files?"

Dream stands beside him, to correct his form. However, he's on his phone and only looks up when he asks.

"I didn't think the information in there would have done anything."

"It would have been good to know," Tommy grumbles. "Can you tell me now?"

Dream halts. "It had your parents' names if I recall correctly. Your abilities and backgrounds. A couple of notes as well, taken over the years. Do you want to know what it said?"

Tommy drops his arms to his side. "Maybe not, then."

"Why?" Dream questions, curiously.

"I don't want to know now. Maybe later, though." He'll ask Dream when he builds the courage to do so. "Can you tell me, when I want you to?"

“Okay, I can do that,” And they come to an agreement.

Sapnap rushes into the room, Dream’s black jacket on. “Are we leaving?”

“Someone’s in a hurry,” Tommy smirks and leaves to his room, to change into more protective wear. They are going to Quackity’s, and he prefers to arrive prepared, in case he can hit the gym or practice with Antfrost.

He returns to shouting again.

“That’s my jacket, Sapnap.”

“You said I could take any of your clothes!”

“Not that one! You know what? Fine. But after, you’re going to buy shit for yourself.”

“Deal, I’ll waste all your money.” Tommy straps a knife to his leg and rolls down his pant sleeve to hide it. “Are we leaving, then?”

“You just want to see Big Q so bad,” Tommy teases. “Love really changes you.”

“You’re a gremlin,”

“We’ll go,” Dream checks his watch, and they decide to go. Tommy walks in front of the two older boys, Sapnap taking his first long scope around the hallways and Dream explains the rooms to him.

“An older married couple lives in this one. If we’re worried about anyone, then it’s the teenage couple down the hall who doesn’t shut up all night.” Tommy snickers at that one. “But you get the idea.”

“Did you do a background check on everyone, before you chose this complex?” Tommy hadn’t even come to Sapnap’s realization until he mentions it.

Dream smirks. “You know me well.”

They leave the complex, and just as they are about to approach Dream’s car, a black vehicle catches Tommy’s attention. He stops dead in his tracks, and Sapnap bumps into him from behind.

“Kid?”

Tommy narrows his eyes at the car. He remembers it from the café, from the other day. He catches it around sometime. The number plate is the same too.

“Wait, I’ll be back,” he mutters. “Wait for me in the car.”

“What do you mean 'wait for you'—” Tommy ignores him and crosses the road. He swipes the knife from his leg and cracks his head to the side, prepared for the inevitable. When he arrives by the car, he knocks on the window of the driver’s seat. He notices through the windows, that a man lays back on a seat, asleep.

Tommy knocks again, only harder. He finally gets the man to open his eyes, however, he scowls and rolls down his window.

“What do you want, kid?” He doesn’t say the term like Sapnap and Dream, and instead, in distaste.

Tommy flickers out a knife and presses it to his neck. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t

stab you through the fucking neck.”

The man’s face turns red, and Tommy wonders if he’s stopped breathing. He moves the knife back, so he can breathe a little better, but his gaze only turns sharper. “Well?”

“I haven’t done anything,” the man grits out.

Tommy presses a hand against the roof of his car so he can squat a little lower and remain in eye contact with the balding man. “I notice you’ve been fucking following me. I’ve remembered your license plate, so don’t start that bullshit with me.”

Tommy is ready to inch the knife closer because the man’s eyes flash and he knows something, but a shadow looms above him, and his knife is snatched from his grip.

Tommy turns around and glares. “Dream.”

“Tommy,” Dream states politely. “I don’t think you should be threatening random civilians.”

“He’s been following us,” Tommy deadpans. “I saw him at the café, and I’ve seen his car before.”

Dream exhales, and the boy hears him murmur something under his breath along the lines of, ‘I can’t deal with this, today.’

“I know that,” Dream resigns. “He’s your bodyguard.”

“What?!” Tommy shouts.

“Quackity hired him for me,” Dream pats the top of his car. “Jim – you’re not doing that well of a job, are you, man?”

Jim still seems pale.

“And I told Quackity to hire someone competent,” Dream rubs his forehead. “Look, I didn’t want to explain it to you like this – but it was a precaution to be safe.”

“You don’t fucking think I can hold up against my own.”

“I know you can,” Dream reassures. “It was to be safe. Jim, you’re not needed right now. I’ll call Quackity, to find your replacement.”

Jim is startled. “But I–”

Dream says with a blaze, which reminds Tommy of Sapnap, “Quackity didn’t hire you to sleep on the job.”

They return to the car, Tommy frowning and Sapnap glancing between them curiously. “What happened?” he asks, to be kept in the loop.

“Dream’s a protective arsehole,” Tommy isn’t too happy with having to move to the backseat, since Sapnap is older and takes a higher priority, but will take it without fuss this once so he won’t have to have Dream’s eyes lurking on him. “He hired me a fucking bodyguard! Why would I need a bodyguard?”

“You never passed any of his classes,” Sapnap resolves, and Dream who is present through the whole conversation, rolls his eyes. “Maybe he thinks you’re not good enough.”

Tommy gulps. He knows Sapnap is joking, but it cuts deeper than that.

“I think Tommy’s good enough,” Dream interrupts quickly because he knows more than anyone else how the words hurt more than a knife to his skin. “I needed someone to look out - Jim did a shit job, though, not reporting when Curtis – an unregistered person to the apartment – entered.” Tommy realizes they still have a lot more to tell Sapnap. *Dream* still has more to tell Tommy as well, if the bodyguard thing was another secret he was willing to keep away.

“Curtis is a good kid,” And they start their drive to Las Nevadas.

“*Is?*” Does he not mean ‘was’?

“The Academy would have reported him dead, but they haven’t.”

“*Sapnap*,” Dream seethes. “You’re telling us now?”

“I forgot! And it’s fine – they don’t know your location, yet. If they found you and wanted you two so badly, they wouldn’t have only bought Curtis. He’s a Graduate, but they could have at least brought someone more experienced. And considering it’s you and Tommy – more than one.”

“So do they want us or not?” Tommy gulps. “Curtis said that they wanted Dream alive. And me, not so much.”

“I couldn’t tell you. The first couple of weeks you two were gone, they kept an extra eye on George and me; we didn’t go on missions of a solid month. Then they ended up realizing that no one as reliable as us could complete the missions, so they had to,” Sapnap thinks. “I don’t know their reasoning for not wanting you alive, Tommy. You were always going to be our fourth – you’re as valuable as we are to them.”

Tommy stares out the window.

“They’re training the younger students more. They found three really good students – a potential collection to their elite students. One of them was your protégé, Dream. That one kid who everyone thought was like you.” Tommy remembers seeing the younger kid for the first time, the same vibrant green eyes, and similar facial structures. It was eerily similar – they could have been brothers.

“Quackity’s accommodation will keep us safe,” Dream reassures. “It’s heavily guarded and his agents live on the same grounds, so we won’t have to worry,” His eyes meet Tommy’s through the mirror. Tommy desperately turns to look away.

“They won’t get to you,” Sapnap grins menacingly. “They’ll have to get through us first.”

“*And* the bodyguard Dream hired,” Tommy grumbles.

Sapnap laughs as Dream throws his hands in the air dismissively. “You know why I did that, Tommy.”

“No, I fucking do not,” Tommy’s been at The Academy for years, he was raised by his Instructors and Teachers and it didn’t take very long to learn how to kill. He can hold up against his own.

“We’ll talk about this later,” They approach Paradise. “Quackity has to go through final preparations of the Red Banquet with us. And, Sapnap will finally have his reunion with him and Karl,”

Sapnap grips onto his seatbelt with widened eyes. “Karl’s here too?”

“Is this a love triangle or something?”

“Shut up, Tommy,” Sapnap freaks out. “Karl can’t be here – *fuck*.”

Dream smirks and the large sign comes into view. Paradise, with large white letters, is a welcoming area that may not be as welcoming as they come inside. “A final reunion, I guess.”

Sapnap punches him in the shoulder and Dream swerves the car and shouts at him.

“*What’s their story?*” George’s whispers ring through Tommy’s ear. Because everyone has a story, including Sapnap, Big Q, and Karl. “*What will your story be, Tommy? How will it end?*”

Tommy thinks of The Academy wanting him dead, and the Red Banquet, and George’s fate, and *his* fate of being their failed fourth.

If George was still here, Tommy would say he doesn’t know. He doesn’t know how his story end will nor does he how many pages he has left.

And maybe if George was here, he could give him the answers he desperately desires.

Chapter End Notes

i think this is the first chapter that i disliked how it turned out :((

did you guys like it? thank you so much for reading <3

after editing note: i was visibly cringing and dying while editing this chapter help

Trustworthy

Chapter Summary

“Oh,” Tommy exhales in understanding. “Is he still in love, or...?”

Dream raises an eyebrow. “Why are you so interested?”

Tommy smirks. “Interesting, innit? Besides, I’ve always wanted to be an uncle.”

“You’ve never said a thing about wanting to be an uncle.” Dream corrects him and Tommy puffs his cheeks out.

“Answer my questions, Dream, you loser.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap’s hair grows longer. Every month, there is a period of the day when all students have their haircut. But Sapnap’s hair grows faster than everyone else’s and falls in front of his eyes when he spars.

George and Dream teach their next lesson. They are his teachers for this class, but they are also his friends.

Sapnap hasn’t had friends before, until them. Others are deterred by his loudness and intensity. For once, he has someone to joke with, and another to tease.

They line up. They will enter their final exam next month. Twelve students stand with them, and they all know some of them will disappear soon. There has never been a year where twelve students have graduated – the most are ten.

Dream calls out numbers. Usually, they stick with the number after or before them on the class roll. But Dream changes them up and Sapnap quirks an eye.

Eight and Seventeen spar. Dream shouts occasionally when one lacks, or the other’s kicks and punches aren’t as powerful as they can be. George only watches carefully. The class may fear Dream’s shouts and corrections, but a silent George can be even scarier.

Eight manages to kick Seventeen in the face and flip him while he regains from shock. Seventeen stands up with a bloody nose and a bruising face. They then stand back in line.

“Eleven and Twenty,” And Sapnap stands forward, eyeing the shorter boy who he has not sparred recently. They face each other, and Dream shouts at them to begin.

Sapnap has always been the best fighter in his class. He is punished because he does not use his mind when he fights, he doesn’t think situations through and analyzes situations. Fighting is the blood under his skin, and he fights with passion and his heart. He does not need to use his mind, when his legs and arms have a sense of their own and will punch Twenty in the shoulder, twisting his arm around to then floor him.

Twenty struggles under his hold. Sapnap grins to himself until his hair that he has secured in a tight ponytail falls in front of his eyes and he goes blind for moments.

Those moments, they are advised to use advantageously. Twenty uses the loosened hold to pull out of the hold and punch Sapnap in the face. He stumbles back and Twenty squares him in the side and raises his knee to reach his face.

Sapnap pulls the hair out of his face and reacts before Twenty can. He grips onto his knee before it collides with his cheek and twists it for Twenty to let out a yelp. He then shoves Twenty backward and pins him down, when he falls to the ground.

Dream shouts for them to stand. Sapnap does, and Twenty struggles after him. Twenty glares at him, but he doesn't expect anything else because his class does not like him.

They return to line and their class is over quickly after. Sapnap is left to pack up the mats, while the rest of the students will begin on their recreation period.

"Do you want to go over the exam later?" George comes up to him and asks. "It's only a month away."

"Sure thing, Gogs," Sapnap pulls his hair back and hopes they will have a haircut beforehand.

Dream pats his shoulder before he leaves. "You did well." George assists Sapnap to finish rolling the mats and pulling them into the storage room.

"You know," George then says. "I have something that can help you."

"With what?" Sapnap glances upwards and George has something in his hand.

Sapnap picks it up. "Since your hair won't stop growing... I was planning to give it to you before you left for the exam, but I guess I'll give it to you now."

Sapnap holds it and his eyes widen a fraction. George has gotten him a white headband. He has never gotten a gift before. He likes it a lot.

"You're speechless, for the first time in your life I assume."

Sapnap punches George's shoulder. "Thanks, Gogy," he says and pulls it on. "I won't ever take it off."

"Uh, you most definitely should," George frowns. "It's unhygienic."

Sapnap laughs.

Tommy watches Sapnap's reaction as he comes face-to-face with Karl. How his face morphs into twenty different emotions at once, and he is left with clear disbelief and shock. Sapnap is rarely

speechless, and this is one of those instances.

Dream rolls his eyes and tugs Tommy's hand. "Let's let them have their reunion," he whispers in his ear and Tommy nods his head.

As they leave, they hear Karl whisper, "Sapnap."

"Karl," Sapnap chokes, but they turn the hallway and leave the two behind.

"I'm confused," Tommy looks up at Dream. "Did Sapnap date Karl or Quackity?"

"Both of them," Dream responds, staring straight forward.

"Oh," Tommy exhales in understanding. "Is he still in love, or...?"

Dream raises an eyebrow. "Why are you so interested?"

Tommy smirks. "Interesting, innit? Besides, I've always wanted to be an uncle."

"You've never said a thing about wanting to be an uncle." Dream corrects him and Tommy puffs his cheeks out.

"Answer my questions, Dream, you loser."

Dream shoves his head lightly. "He's in love."

"With who?"

"Both of them."

Tommy raises his eyebrows. They reach the meeting room Quackity announced them to meet him at. As he is not there, they stroll in and take a seat on the spinning chairs. While Dream takes out his phone, Tommy spins his chair and continues his questions.

"Who did he date first?" he asks.

Dream snorts to himself. "Both of them."

Tommy takes a while to process his words. When he does, he stops spinning the chair and gasps. "You're fucking kidding me."

"I'm not." Dream finds Tommy's reaction humorous.

"Sapnap's a homewrecker!"

Dream bursts out in a set of wheezes. Tommy does too. "He's not a homewrecker, they both knew. It was a – three-person relationship."

"Ohh," Because that makes more sense. "How the fuck do you know, anyway?"

"Sapnap told me when you were asleep."

"That bitch!" Tommy leans back in his seat. "Why didn't he tell me? I'm more trustworthy with information – and I can keep secrets longer."

"Really?" Dream hums and places his phone down on the table to lean forward. "And what are these secrets, you're keeping?"

Tommy opens his mouth and then stops. “Nice try, Dream.”

Quackity, Slime, and Antfrost head into the room before they can conclude their conversation. What catches their attention, is that Quackity isn’t smiling, and they seem tense. A man with a black uniform and golden chains follows them to their door, and Tommy remembers his name to be Punz. He’s one of Quackity’s guards, and Tommy notices him talking with Antfrost from time to time.

“Big Q?” Tommy greets, but it ends up as a question to understand why Quackity is frowning.

“We have a big problem,” He says, and Tommy pushes his chair near the table, and Dream sits forward. “This isn’t good.”

“What is it?” Dream requires as Quackity sits at the head of the table. Punz stands behind him, and Slimecicle and Antfrost seat in front of them. Antfrost takes out his computer and connects it to the projector that reflects on the large white screen behind Big Q.

Karl and Sapnap stroll into the room then, with not the best timing. If Tommy wasn’t so stressed and Big Q’s next words, he would tease Sapnap for the goofy smile plastered on his face and expression settled in his features.

“Sapnap?” Quackity stands up in disbelief and the urgent news is forgotten monetarily. “You’re here.”

“Quackity,” Sapnap looks like his heart has stopped beating. The students in his class would often whisper to each other, figuring out Sapnap’s drawbacks and how he’d be ever taken out in a fight. Sapnap will be expected to survive. If only Tommy could tell them that the sight of Sapnap’s boyfriends is enough to stop his beating heart.

Quackity walks to them and does not hesitate to wrap his arms around him. Sapnap’s taller than Quackity, shorter than Karl, but their embrace still seems comfortable.

“You’re staying?” And Tommy knows there is more behind his words. “You’re not leaving this time?”

“I’m not,” Sapnap promises. “I’m staying.”

“We’ll catch up,” Quackity doesn’t blink, as if he’s afraid this is all a dream. Tommy can attest that it’s felt like one. “Don’t think you’re off the hook.”

Sapnap rubs the back of his head. “I didn’t think I was.”

“As much as I’d want to interrupt this,” Antfrost calls. “We have a slightly large problem, and we can’t start until you guys finish.”

Quackity nods his head, and Tommy watches as he changes like a light switch, and returns to a more professional, stricter side. “Has Dream filled you up to date?”

Alike to Quackity, Sapnap's face morphs into strictness. Although that’s because the teachings have been drilled into him and he had to be able to change to a calmer and orderly side, to survive so long. Sapnap sits next to Tommy, and Quackity sits at his front seat.

Tommy watches as Karl sits down. He would assume the man would sit on the other side of the table, where they have made a silent agreement to split off with their respective groups, but he sits next to Sapnap instead with a smile. Antfrost raises both eyebrows but finally continues typing.

“Before I present the information,” Antfrost sighs and leans back in his seat, stretching his arms to rest the back of his head. “Dream, I may need you to confirm that you won’t get angry.”

“Angry?” Dream scoffs.

“This is regarding Tommy,” Tommy sits up straighter and stares at Antfrost. Sapnap who whispers with Karl, stops to lean forward in intrigue. “And knowing you, you’re going to set off a reaction.”

“It’s true,” Slime agrees. “You’re very caring of him.”

Tommy’s cheeks heat and Sapnap stifles a laugh.

“Just tell us,” Dream rumbles. “I might get angry if you put this off any longer.”

Antfrost takes one of the cables and pulls it into the computer. The white screen behind Quackity flashes, and he pushes his chair to the side to watch the screen. Punz walks to the other side of the wall.

Tommy’s face flickers on the wall. Tommy tenses.

He’s not Tommy in the picture, though. He is Sixteen. He is Theseus.

“The Academy sent out his picture to agencies.” Tommy gulps and cannot look at the picture any longer. His skin is purple from bruising and he has brown hair. His eyes are what push him to glance away. They’re cold blue and made up of nothingness. “They want him – they sent out a reward for anyone who can bring him to a location stated.”

The room does not speak. Antfrost stares at the photo, his eyes flickering to Tommy slowly.

Tommy’s fingers grip the wooden table and he stares at the wooden table in nothing but shock.

Dream growls from beside him. “Antfrost–”

Antfrost does not allow him to interrupt. “I know you’re going to shout at me, and I’ll say it now before you ask me. No, this isn’t a joke. No, I am not making this up. The email was sent through to us, untraceable.”

Tommy sweats and his hands feel clammy. He’s going to hyperventilate.

“How much?” he dares to ask. “How much is the reward?”

“A hundred thousand dollars.” Dream swears very loudly and Sapnap is about to jump out of his seat, but Karl restrains him. “They said they’re willing to increase the price, though.”

Tommy’s going to hyperventilate, very soon. But his shoes are cemented to the floor, and he needs to stay to hear more.

“We’ll kill them,” Sapnap cracks his knuckles. “We’re going to the location, and we’ll kill every single person there.”

“Okay,” Dream agrees and if Tommy was conscious enough, he would realize how ruthless his older brothers are. Dream, who promised to stop killing, does not hesitate to mention death now.

“The location will be guarded, and you’ll be outnumbered,” Slime reminds them. “Why do they want Tommy? It seems as if you two know.”

Tommy's ears ring. He forces himself to listen.

"We know they want him," Dream says reluctantly. "They want him dead, for whatever reason."

"They want me dead because I *failed*," And Dream finally notices that Tommy's not doing to best. He is at his side in an instant, forcing the younger boy to listen through his pounding heartbeats.

"Breathe," Dream must remind him. "Copy my breaths."

Tommy does. He feels like he's dying.

"Again, again, Tommy," Dream repeats and grips his hand. The room dims, and it's just them again. Tommy in his seat and Dream kneeling next to him, his eyes boring into the younger's. "You're doing well, keep going."

Tommy follows. "I'm going to be sick."

"I'll call medical," Quackity says with softness.

"No," Tommy gulps. "I need to listen." He will stop being so weak and uncontrolled and stay. Dream seems unsure, so does Quackity. But Tommy refuses to leave.

Sapnap scoots his chair closer to him. "You okay, kid?" he asks as Antfrost types on his computer again, and Slime talks lowly to Punz. Sapnap speaks in Greek, so no one else understands but them three. "Tell me – what did you mean you 'failed'?"

"I failed," Tommy whispers in Greek.

"What do you mean?"

Tommy glances at Dream and nods his head, for him to explain.

He does. "The Academy had expectations for Tommy to be their fourth until they realized he wasn't 'enough.' When they did, they did it themselves – to make him in our fourth."

"What?" Sapnap whispers, and they swap to Arabic. "How did you – *what* did they do?"

"They tested on him," Dream says as painful as it for him to admit it. Tommy's breaths fasten again and before they escalate, Dream wraps his arm around the younger's shoulder and forces his head into his shoulder. Tommy calms down. "They forced him into their fucking experiments because they wanted him to be of higher standards."

"Tommy," Sapnap seethes, and he knows the anger is not directed at him. "What did they do exactly?"

Tommy's throat closes and he can't respond to Sapnap.

"They," Dream chokes. "They wired him and injected him. Tommy told me before – they'd given him our blood and–"

Sapnap stands up and leaves the room. Everyone else, including Punz, stares at Dream and Tommy, with a wonder of their exact conversation. They don't understand Greek or Arabic, so they cannot identify the contents of the situation.

"He'll be back," Dream leans back, and Tommy sits back in his chair again. His heart has settled down and he won't be surprised if he has heart problems after this whole ordeal. "I hope."

"I'll go get him," Karl stands and turns towards the door.

"Karl," Quackity sighs. "We'll give him a bit of space for now. We have more to discuss, and we will have to inform him later."

"There's more?" Dream rages.

"Tommy was going to come with us to the Red Banquet," Big Q starts off by saying. "Although, that isn't the best idea now, as all people at the meeting will connect that Tommy is Theseus easily."

"Tommy won't go," Dream refuses to no questioning. "It won't be safe enough."

For the first time, Tommy agrees with Dream. He craves action and was looking forward to pulling out his knives. But the thought of death unsettles him and leaves a dreadful feeling at the pit of his stomach.

"That's the thing," Quackity hesitates. "Tommy's presence can come in hand when dealing with Phil—"

"No," Dream denies immediately. "No, that won't happen."

"Dream," Antfrost interrupts. "Quackity has a point. To earn Phil's trust, then we'll need an ultimatum. We will be working with his agency for a while, and his numbers will back us up through resistance. For him to agree, we need Tommy with us."

"That won't do anything," Dream denies with a scowl. "Phil doesn't like us – he wants each student gone and arrested."

Antfrost glances at Quackity warily, like he's confused of a fact, and Big Q interrupts very quickly. "See, and Tommy with us, will show that we're willing to do this without him. With him or without, we'll go ahead. But we'll both benefit together."

It makes sense, Tommy understands fast. Something about the room feels unsettling as if everyone is holding their breaths and awaiting something that has not come yet. A tenseness, Tommy doesn't know how to feel about. He likes Quackity, but he doesn't trust him fully. And he doesn't know Karl, Antfrost, and Slime enough to say anything more about them.

Although Sapnap does trust Karl and Quackity. That means something, somewhere.

"The Red Banquet has a different dress code and theme every meeting," Antfrost suddenly says. "And this year's themes are masks and animosity."

Quackity laughs and pulls his legs onto the table. "That's good for us, isn't it?"

"It's mandatory," And they all stare at Dream who scoffs. They likely assume he will refuse to dress up. "If you're not wearing appropriate clothing, they kick you out."

"How prestigious," Dream mocks. "I guess we'll be there then."

They devise a plan shortly after. Sapnap returns with Karl, and he sits down wordlessly, ignoring the glances sent by both Quackity and Dream. It doesn't take long for him to start talking again although here is a familiar sight of orange behind his green eyes.

They will arrive near the location, thirty minutes after the event has begun. Quackity states to

come fashionably late, as any earlier can cause more attention. Tommy assumes they will be sat at tables and food will come around, but Quackity clears their assumptions and explains how food is stretched across long tables and how everyone stands around, talking.

Quackity says that approaching the end of the night, they will lead Phil and his associates to another room, and then they will discuss their plans. Antfrost and other agents will be located outside, for backup. Punz will accompany to and stand outside the door to ensure that no others can hear them.

“I’d recommend not to touch the food,” Quackity explains. “One year they were drugged. Another, poisoned.”

They all nod their heads. Tommy knows he should pay attention, but his mind wanders off every so second, and when he tunes back into their conversation, he does not understand what they are speaking about. He hopes that Dream will explain it to him afterward.

“We’ll all be armed,” Antfrost goes through their procedures and signals. “Everyone present is either business representatives or from agencies themselves.”

“That’s where they make their deals,” Dream says, speaking into the conversation after being silent for a while. He’s thinking and analyzing the plan and ready to pinpoint any present mistakes that he can identify. “I remember when I went – they introduced me to the business partners. Sometimes, they will hire us.”

“Hire?” Karl asks, confusion laced through his tone and interest.

“They’ll hire the Graduates,” Sapnap explains to him. “Some come back, some do not. It depends on how much they are willing to pay.”

“How much?” Quackity tilts his head. “Are they willing?”

“Depends on the assassin,” Sapnap smirks. “A standard one of us will be approximately one hundred thousand. Dreamy-boy over here, their star student – I’d say a million.”

Quackity’s eyes widen and Karl gasps.

Dream sighs and glares at Sapnap. “You didn’t have to tell them that, Sapnap,” he mutters in French.

“I trust Quackity,” Sapnap responds in Greek with a grin. “He won’t do anything.”

“Okay,” Quackity interrupts. “One of us has to pick up a language. Multiple, in fact.”

Sapnap laughs and Tommy’s lips quirk upwards. It isn’t easy to speak or understand a language fluently. It was easier for them, with the repetitive lessons and thought of death looming about their heads.

The meeting is over, not long after. Antfrost says before they exit the room, “Sam has mentioned the banquet. I know Phil, Techno, and Ranboo will be present.”

“Ranboo?” Tommy asks.

“I don’t know why they’d bring a kid,” Quackity grumbles, and his eyes meet Tommy. “Okay, that isn’t what I mean—”

Tommy grins. "I agree Big Q, I'm not a kid."

Sapnap ruffles his hair and Dream rolls his eyes. Antfrost and Slime leave, then. Tommy tells Antfrost he'll be training with him later and receives a nod in response.

"Punz," Quackity glances at the blond-haired man who has stood silently the whole time. "You are dismissed."

Punz's eyes flicker to Dream, Sapnap, Tommy, Karl, and then back to Quackity. He leaves.

"I'll clear a couple of rooms in our accommodation," Quackity tells Dream. "Many of my agents live there at the moment, but I will be able to clear a floor for you."

"Thanks, Quackity," Dream nods his head and is sincere because Quackity does not have to do what he's doing. But they're all in danger, and even if they are previous assassins of The Academy, nothing can be safe anymore. Until The Academy is down, the Teachers and Headmaster captured the students free, and George avenged, will they live.

"I think I'll stay with Quackity this afternoon," Sapnap gazes at Dream for approval. "If that's alright."

Dream smirks. "Sure, Sapnap."

Dream waves and Sapnap ruffles Tommy's hair. "We will talk when I get home," Sapnap murmurs quickly in Greek because it is the language, he is most familiar with. (Tommy assumes it is because of a 6-month-old mission he spent in Greece). "Stay safe."

They promise and then they leave.

They spend their afternoon watching the sunset.

It is just as old times. Quackity will remain stoic and tense until he basks in the warmth of company. Karl will say stories and push Sapnap to stop being so quiet.

And Sapnap will appreciate all. He will appreciate the sight of the sun, and his boyfriends finally with him, and the love and warmth that spreads through him and makes him feel something again. After the numbness and emptiness of fate of George, he can inhale and exhale clearer.

"Can you tell us what happened to Tommy?" Karl asks softly as the orange mixes with the bright yellow skies, a reminder of what the color of the leaves used to be until they had fallen. "Is he okay?"

Sapnap's eyes flicker open, and his eyes meet the concerned eyes of his other. "I don't know how to answer that."

"You left the room," Quackity notes. "Can you tell us?"

Sapnap won't. "He might tell you; it isn't my place."

Quackity and Karl both respect his wishes. "When you said you had a kid brother, I didn't expect him."

They would think Sapnap was a normal person, with normal goals and normal passions. They thought he had been traveling the world when they met him. Quackity had large ambitions, and he'd begun a business which was skyrocketing, Karl with him for the journey. The two met in college and dropped out three days after, on the same day.

(Sapnap is everything they don't think he is.

Once he leaves, he has to admit the truth. He feels horrible for lying to them, but at the same time, he misses the feeling he had attained being with them – the unusual feeling which was very unlike the sour and low moods he felt usually.

He doesn't know what it is until Quackity tells him over the phone,

"It's love," Quackity explains.

"I'm not used to it," Sapnap replies. "I've never felt this way before."

"Do you not have a family?" Sapnap's lies unravel.

"I have brothers," Sapnap confesses. "Two older and a kid one."

"Then you love them," Quackity says like it's simple, but Sapnap has never been so confused before. *"The love we have is different, Sapnap. You love them because they are family."*

"I don't know if I can do it. I don't know if I can be who you think I am or want me to be. I don't know how to love – and I don't know what love even is."

"That's okay," Quackity says with kindness. *"Come home, Sapnap."*

Sapnap can't. He has The Academy. They will find him and bring him back. Sapnap has always resigned to his assassin agency, but for once, he wants to break out.)

"We're all affected by The Academy, and unfortunately, Tommy got the worst of it," Sapnap says after a silence. He enjoys what he has now. Before it's too late. "Thank you Quackity."

Quackity is startled slightly. "Uh – no worries."

Karl smiles. "Quackity and I will help you when you need it. Don't forget."

Sapnap isn't so used to help and having people present for him. He has always had Dream, George, and Tommy – but Quackity and Karl are different.

He wonders how they will react that Sapnap prepares to die. He knows that taking down The Academy is not easy and may result in death. He will protect the people he loves and save those children. He wonders how they will react, and if they accept it.

He wonders about the length of love and if they will understand why he will do, what he plans to do.

Sapnap wonders if it will be enough for them to stop loving him.

Phil won't tell anyone of his discovery.

He knows three things about Theseus, currently.

He knows the boy has run from the academy he has grown up in. A place no young boy should grow up and endure, yet he has.

He also is informed that Theseus is in California. He knows Theseus can be so close, yet so far.

And lastly, Phil knows he is one of the best assassins. He knows that Theseus is not used to family, and love, and kindness. He is used to cruelty because it was a cruel world, he grew up in.

Phil is a smart man. He has been in this business for years; he knows how this place works. And he certainly knows that the Red Banquet will involve parties coming together and discussing splits in the reward prize for capturing him. This is one of the largest pays for a wanted student, Phil has heard of. There will be tension, and the event will not run smoothly. He will be prepared and be safe.

One day, he will take Theseus back.

Until then, he will wait. He will scheme and plan. Soon, he will inform Techno, and then Will.

Soon, Theseus will come home, and finally, he will have his son back.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter is going to be very intense (or so i hope!) might add bamf quackity to the tags because next chapter will bring it justice.

(but who knows there's no plan in this book i'm just writing as i'm going)

thank you so much for reading! the comments made me happy to read last chapter (and for some people in the comments of the last chapter, read the tags carefully ;))

Red Banquet (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

"Tommy?" Sapnap, next to him, has noticed he has completely zoned out of their conversation. "You good, man?"

"The song," he whispers and recalls a song of his past. He hums it under his breath, but he can never remember the ending. It is a song from his past life before he lost his memories and soul. Tommy has not fully been fascinated by the facts of his previous self.

He had a father, a mother, and two brothers. That is all he can remember and wants to. Yet the song tugs his heartstrings and mind, and urges a memory out of him. A memory locked away, and the key hidden.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy is forced to wear a white shirt and dark red blazer. He pulls on black pants and keeps his red sneakers on because Dream can't force him to wear ugly brown shoes with pointed tips.

"You have to wear a tie," Dream sighs exasperatedly. "Tommy."

"I'm not wearing a fucking tie," Tommy rushes away before Dream can protest further. They stand in the living room, where Dream holds the packaged and custom-made clothes that Quackity has sent today. Dream calls for Tommy, but the younger boy ignores him, shoving his bedroom door open and heading towards his closet.

He frowns at Sapnap who lays on his bed, staring up at his phone. He wears a black and golden shirt, and his dark-colored sweater is discarded on the edge of the bed, forgotten. Sapnap has already managed to have his ironed shirt crumpled, however, he shows no care. Tommy assumes he's texting Quackity and Karl because when he's not around them, he's either talking about them or texting them.

Tommy takes out his black duffel bag from his closet, and unzips it while grumbling at Sapnap, "How come you get a phone?"

"You have a phone too."

"It took months until Dream brought me one," Tommy frowns and tests the knives he has stored in the bag. He flickers them out, staring at the edge before dropping them back in. Technically, they're Dream's weapons too.

"You're a child," Sapnap sings while scrolling. "Be grateful."

"Well, you have a better one,"

"Tommy!" Dream shouts from the other room. "Stop complaining and put the tie on!"

“Are you purposely being difficult?” Sapnap laughs and drops the phone beside him to stretch. Tommy pauses his search to glare up at him.

“No.”

Tommy eventually finds the knife he’s been looking for. The sharp edge glistens under the escaping sunlight into the room, and the engraved handle feels nice between his fingers. He straps it to his leg and finds another to hide in his shoe. He then collects a gun to hide by his belt.

It’s a second nature to him. Alike the countless missions he has prepared for before, the Red Banquet will be just like one.

Dream comes marching into the room, forcing the door open. He holds the tie in one hand and his phone in the other. “Tommy,” he lectures.

Tommy has no escape. Dream blocks the door from his exit, and with proper bribery, Sapnap will join his side.

“I can’t wear a tie,” Tommy complains. “It makes me feel suffocated. And old.”

“Lay off the kid,” Sapnap agrees with him and stretches his arms above his head.

Dream’s eyes snap to him. “That shirt was ironed, Sapnap. And where are your shoes?”

Sapnap gets out of bed, complaining at Dream as he passes him outside the bedroom. Dream’s slightly taller figure towers over him and watches his movements until he leaves.

“Sapnap’s right,” Tommy complains when it’s just the two of them.

“No,” Dream disagrees. “If I have to, then so does the both of you.” Dream has made it his mission to make everyone suffer along with him. He doesn’t like dressing up, and since he is forced to, he will force Tommy into a tie and Sapnap into an ironed shirt.

“I’m not putting on the tie!”

Tommy ends up putting on the tie.

He complains the whole time as Dream does for him, watching a YouTube video on his phone because none of them know how to. His older brother rolls his eyes but does not respond to his remarks. They don’t take long to figure it out, because Dream is a fast learner, but Dream blames the hard-to-follow instructions of the tutorial anyway.

Tommy then must use hair gel to slick his curly blond locks back and frowns at his appearance because he looks so unlike himself. He uses pins to pull back the stray curls, but they end up flying in front of his eyes and Sapnap must help.

Once he finishes, Sapnap and he walks back to the living room where Dream pulls knives into the pockets of his blazers. Sapnap finally puts on his sweater, tucking out his golden collar and pulling the dark sleeves to his elbows.

“Take these,” Dream tosses Sapnap a knife, and he catches them midair with one hand. “Quackity will supply us with more when we meet.” He then goes to grab his mask and Sapnap eyes Tommy from head to toe.

“You clean up well, kid,” Sapnap nods his head approvingly. Tommy pulls on his tie, glaring at it.

“Keep it on,” Dream does not hesitate to say when he returns with their colorful masks. Tommy would shout at him again, but the presence of objects in his hands is enough to keep him keen.

Dream hands Sapnap his first. It is a dark red and pointed mask with golden edges that match his shirt well. The dark red changes to orange under the glare of light and the contrast makes Tommy’s eyes widen.

Dream hands Tommy’s next. A crimson mask that covers half his face and upper nose will conceal his identity and ensure he won’t stand out. When he tries it on, it’s a bit tight, but Dream tells him it’s to make sure there’s no chance of it falling any time of the night.

Dream’s mask is last, and it covers his whole face. It is white and plain, and eerily similar to the one he would wear at The Academy. Tommy almost is reminded of the countless missions they would go on together and the ruthless killer he was when the mask covered his face. But it has many differences because Dream cannot be recognized. The mask is a shade darker and shaped differently.

“We’re ready,” Dream makes sure that everything is well and perfect. He fixes Tommy’s collar and makes sure Sapnap’s mask fits. “Only ten minutes late.”

They book out of their apartment room, nerves flying in the air. But then and there, as soon as their polished shoes leave the bedroom, they become the assassins they once were. Sixteen, Eleven, and Fourteen. Theseus, Sapnap, and Dream. They do not fear because they are feared. They do not hold back with their knives and won’t think twice about pulling their guns out to shoot.

In the car, no one speaks. They are silent because they must think the night over and have a moment to themselves. Tommy does not argue with Dream about his tie and Sapnap does not bring his phone out. They will sit in silence and think and understand the situation in front of them.

As they approach the meeting spot with Quackity, Dream turns the radio low and starts a conversation. “Tommy, I want you to stick with one of us tonight. If you can’t find Sapnap or me, then at least stick with Quackity and Karl.” Dream waits for confirmation. “I know you can hold yourself well, kid. It’s the Academy reward, and you being a target for all the people there being my concern.

Tommy understands. “Okay, Dream,”

“Keep your phones with you at all times. If a fight does break out – or something happens, get out of the building and find somewhere safe.”

They both nod their heads.

“We should regroup every hour or so,” Sapnap suggests as he sharpens his knife, and lifts it for a better look. “If we speak to other representatives, it will give us more of an insight of the people who are with The Academy and will participate to find Tommy.”

Dream agrees with his idea. “And Tommy? No alcohol.” He adds, “Although that should be obvious enough.”

Tommy scowls. “Sapnap isn’t twenty-one yet.”

“I trust him to drink responsibly,” Dream eyes his friend daringly. “He can pass for it, as well. We don’t want unnecessary questions and you don’t know how to pace yourself either.”

Tommy frowns but nods his head anyway.

Dream continues with his speech as they pull up. Their car is hidden under the shade of a tree and away from any eye. They get out of the car and start walking towards the meeting spot. Tommy stands in between his brothers and watches their surroundings carefully.

“We have to have a clear mind,” Dream reminds Sapnap. “Don’t drink too much.” He cannot risk having his mind foggy in the middle of a fight. Lucky for them, procedures similar have been taught, as they once had to spar while drugged. It wasn’t easy, but over time they got used to it.

Quackity and his group are seen in a distance, then. Tommy makes out bright-colored clothing and fancy wear, and soon they stand in front of them.

Quackity wears a golden blazer with black buttons. Accompanied are black pants and golden shoes. He coordinates with Sapnap, although Quackity sticks to sparkly colors, including his silver mask. Karl wears grey pants and a purple and blue blazer. His mark covers his eyes, and he wears bright contacts. And lastly, Slime is with them with a vibrant green suit and mask.

Punz and Antfrost are not present, and Tommy assumes they are already in position, away from the building. Quackity confirms their thoughts. “They’re there already, you guys are late.”

“Blame Dream,” Sapnap strolls through them and smirks in Karl’s direction. “The motherfucker doesn’t know how to hurry up.” Dream is used to everything being perfect.

“Very well, then,” Quackity sighs and checks his watch – gold. “We’ll start heading there, then.” Tommy pulls on his mask, and so do his brothers.

They walk together, Sapnap chatting with Karl, while Quackity leads the group with Slime. Dream and Tommy stick at the back.

Dream’s eyes stay on him. “Are you okay, Tommy?”

Tommy nods his head and his eyebrows furrow. “Yeah, why?”

Dream tosses his arm around the younger’s shoulder. “When you push yourself into training and going to the gym all day, I can’t help but worry.”

“I did it to prepare for tonight,” Tommy informs him, fixing his mask higher.

“I know you did, but I’ll worry anyway,” Dream chuckles. Tommy can’t see his face, but he knows that he smiles. “I don’t want you to push yourself into training again, to take your mind off things.”

“That applies to you too,” Tommy retorts. “You tell me to talk and open up, but I know you’re not over George, even if you act like you are. I’m not going to have a nervous breakdown with the mention of his name. He was my brother – but he was also your boyfriend.”

Dream shoves him, but Tommy does not stumble. “Yeah, yeah.”

“Dream,” Tommy’s eyes become intense, maybe it’s because of the mask that covers his other features. “Talk to me about George. Sometimes it’s nice to be reminded that you’re human. You have emotions as we do.” Tommy brings his hands up to play with his tie that feels tighter against his neck, while Dream slaps away.

“Don’t touch it,” He scolds. “I can’t redo it if you take it apart.”

“Good,” Tommy mutters but drops his hands.

Their conversation drops and Quackity who stands at the front of the line turns around. “We’re here,” he announces and takes out their invitation slips.

The Red Banquet is situated in an abandoned building at the edge of town; or at least, that’s what it appears to be. They must provide their tickets to the front guards and take the elevators to a lower level. There, Quackity must tell them a secret code only invitees will know – and they are led to the large room.

Tommy’s eyes analyze every inch and exit of the property. He marks the position of the elevator and notices the exact weapons on the guard’s belts.

Oak doors painted in a thick layer of gold meet them at the end of the long hallway. Carved with intricate designs, they shape words and hidden pictures between the edges. The golden handles almost look too breakable to touch, but Quackity reaches for them with his gloved hands and pushes the handle.

Tommy does not know what expects when he steps in. But his eyes are certainly... compelled with the sight in front of them.

The room is crowded with men and women with fancy suits and dresses, and odd-shaped masks. What surprises Tommy the most is the thick red walls and carpet, embracing the title of ‘Red’ in the event. The tables are red themselves, and there is an odd odor that lifts through the air. Tommy’s eyes lock the food on the table, a chocolate fountain, weirdly shaped strawberries, and widespread of small deserts that he could have hundreds of.

The music is low, and the stage by the back of the room is empty.

This will certainly be interesting; Tommy thinks as he feels for the knife in his pocket.

“Dream,” Quackity then speaks in Spanish, his accent spilling through his words. “We will regroup near two.”

“Okay,” Dream’s eyes glue to the right side of the room, Tommy wonders what. “Stay safe,” he responds in Spanish and walks away.

Slime grins. “The food looks so good, Q.”

“Don’t eat it,” Quackity reminds but rubs his forehead. “If you can’t hold back, then at least aim for packaged food.”

“I’ll sniff out the poison,” Slime jokes, but maybe it isn’t one, and leaves. Karl and Quackity go their separate ways and Sapnap is left with Tommy.

“Guess I’m on babysitting duty,” Sapnap sighs but he doesn’t seem too mad. “Let’s go then,” He drags Tommy’s arm away, and Tommy yelps, keeping his distance. He sticks by his brother as they scurry through the crowd. They end up near the stage, observing the other people around them. Tommy notes the long dresses and black tuxedos he sees, accompanied by different shaped masks all around.

Sapnap begins to talk to Tommy, while his eyes dart around but Tommy drowns him out until Sapnap is nudging his shoulder and they look up at the stage.

There, a man walks onto the podium with black attire, black pants, a shirt, and a cape. The mask he wears has a red lining that matches the color of the walls, and his arms raise to reveal his black rings.

Sapnap mutters to Tommy, “He’s Halo. The organizer.”

Tommy nods his head and watches as he taps the microphone, all eyes turning to him. The music in the background fades to a stop. “Good evening, everyone!” His voice echoes and bounces off the red walls. “Thank you all for coming to the Red Banquet. Many new faces – or I’d put it, *masks* here today.” A round of chatter returns his joke, and Tommy doesn’t know how they find his words so funny. Sapnap doesn’t either, and Tommy can hear his eye-rolling from behind his disguise. “I’ll keep this short and sweet – enjoy the night! Drinks will be coming around soon, and we’ll have a couple of performances near the end of tonight. Let the Red Banquet commence!”

Clapping starts, and Tommy raises his hands to follow. His eyes scan Halo’s mask, noticing the deepest shade of black allows him to blend within the shadows. An eeriness radiates him, as well as suspicion.

“Don’t talk to him if he comes near,” Sapnap frowns, clearly not one to enjoy the sudden speech. Everyone around continues back into their conversation once again. Sapnap’s eyes stay at the back of the stage, and he thinks. “Something feels off.”

“Everything feels off,” Tommy agrees. The chattering, and raised wine glasses, and the eerie sounding music create an atmosphere of unfamiliarity and strangeness. He is on edge and ready to pull out his knife. He must remind himself that everyone here is trained as him, at least most of them. They come from organizations and agencies themselves and likely know of his other form – Theseus.

Sapnap continues talking to Tommy. However, they both glance around and edge their fingers towards their knives. Their eyes lookout for noises, and they will whisper to each other if they think anything out of the ordinary appears. They have trained together and completed missions with one another before. (Very rarely – Tommy may add, as The Academy usually only placed him with George and Dream). They are trained for the inevitable, they are prepared for the worst.

Across the room, Dream lurks between walls and shadows. He watches and waits.

He can hear all the conversations around him. He picks the one of two men in similar colored ties and expensive suits. “Where is Institution Laurance? I heard they’re bringing their best agents today,”

“We’ll speak to them. The boss did want a more experienced agent for their next job.”

“How much is he willing?”

“About ten thousand.”

Dream stands closer as their words turn quieter. “That isn’t much. Did he not bid a hundred thousand for that other student overseas?”

“He did,”

Dream moves away. No one sees him, he is a shadow. Today, he is not Dream. He is Fourteen and he is on a mission again. He takes the earpiece from his pocket and taps it on. “Antfrost?” He mutters and keeps his eyes trained on his surroundings.

“Dream,” Antfrost is heard. “I hear you, and we have a slight problem.”

“What is it?” Dream furrows his eyebrows.

“I don’t want to alarm you or anything – but The Academy is arriving.”

“What?” Dream hisses and pushes deeper into the shadows. No one will see or recognize him.

“How do you know?”

“I intercepted calls from the radio tower, and they’ve called in to confirm their attendance. Their cars have not arrived yet, but I’m on the lookout.”

Dream is calm. He will remain collected. He is the best assassin of The Academy, after all. “Keep me updated. We have to finish the deal with Phil before we can leave.”

“Okay,” Dream taps his earpiece, and all is silent other than the chattering.

Dream slides his rings through his fingers and watches. He is trained and experienced. He is ready.

Slime stares at the food in front of him.

He notices how the strawberries seem tampered with and the food appears glazed.

There is a reason why Quackity had hired him years ago. His senses are enhanced, he was born with better smell, taste, and sight than many. And watching the food now, he knows that there is something wrong with them.

Slimecicle’s eyes move to a woman who takes a strawberry and dips the fruit in the fountain of chocolate. She takes a careful bite and hums and the sweetness. He assumes they are not drugged by her reaction.

Slime takes one for himself and raises it towards his eye. A man across from him stares to watch him. The bottom half of his face is covered, his eyes furrowed as they question his odd gesture.

Slime drops the strawberry and laughs. “I’m allergic,” He walks off.

The last time the food had been tampered with, he is aware of an assassination attempt of one of the leaders of another agency. Another year, when they were drugged, it had put people to sleep and a drowsy mess, for a kidnapping to occur.

Since then, the event has become more confidential, and food is tested and treated beforehand. Slime will inform Quackity and then Antfrost.

To say the least, he thinks, tonight will certainly not be boring.

Quackity and Karl cannot keep their eyes off each other.

The music is slow, and so are their feet as they move their bodies to the sounds that project out of the speakers. Quackity does not know the song, but he knows that this is his dance.

“You know,” Karl says with a sigh and touches the disguise that covers his face. “I would have liked to see you,”

“Yeah?” Quackity grins

“Your face, it’s a shame your mask is covering it.”

Quackity holds his hand, and they join the other couples who dance together. There, their hands meet one another’s, and their shoes have a soul of their own and move to the rhythm.

“We need a holiday,” Karl says. “You’re always so busy at work and we haven’t spoken to Sapnap in ages. A long-deserved holiday.”

“Once this is over,” Quackity says and that’s a promise. “We’ll go anywhere you want to go.”

Quackity cannot see Karl’s smile, but he knows that he does.

For a second, they will dance and listen to the music, and forget of the pressures and burdens that lay on their shoulders and in their future. They hold this memory and moment before they must let go.

The music is louder, and their heartbeats are faster.

They enjoy the calm before the storm.

A man walks to the stage, with a violin.

There, he positions the instrument under his collarbone and hesitates.

His fingers gently press the bow, while his fingers will rely on memory. The music through the speakers has stopped, and watchful eyes of invitees will watch with fascination and intrigue, as the man's eyelids flutter closed, and the music begins.

As soon as the music reaches Tommy's ears from across the room, he recognizes the sound and his mind slows.

"Tommy?" Sapnap, next to him, has noticed he has completely zoned out of their conversation. "You good, man?"

"The song," he whispers and recalls a song of his past. He hums it under his breath, but he can never remember the ending. It is a song from his past life before he lost his memories and soul. Tommy has not fully been fascinated by the facts of his previous self.

He had a father, a mother, and two brothers. That is all he can remember and wants to. Yet the song tugs his heartstrings and mind, and urges a memory out of him. A memory locked away, and the key hidden.

"Can we listen?" Tommy asks. "Can we?"

"Uh, sure?" Sapnap is confused but follows Tommy as he pushes the crowd to reach the pack of people, who stand around to listen to the piece. Bodies are in the way, and Tommy can't afford to miss the ending. Lucky for him, he can squeeze his way through, and dodge past the glasses of drink and people who stand around, to meet the front.

Sapnap has lost him by the time he reaches the sound. It will only be a couple of moments until the song finishes, and afterward, Tommy will look for his brother again.

Until then, Tommy listens.

The violinist's body sways, and their head is tilted downwards. A commotion stirs around him, and Tommy desperately attempts to ignore it, standing closer.

But then there is screaming, and the song stops.

Glass shatters somewhere and the violinist disappears. Screaming is heard and Tommy can smell the scent of blood.

Someone grabs his shoulders, and Tommy is Theseus.

He grabs the hand, and twists it away from him, to pull out his knife and aim it at the man's skin.

But the man is Dream. "Isn't Sapnap meant to be with you?" He shouts as the screaming continues and chaos ensues.

"He is!" Tommy cannot recall where he went. "What's going on?"

"The Academy," Dream declares. "They're here."

Somewhere else, someday sooner, she sings a song for her sons.

Her youngest is asleep before she finishes. Her hands comb his brown curls, and she will wonder about the boy he will one day be.

Her other sons rest awake beside her; however, they will soon be asleep too. Until then, her flowery words become whispers and she holds onto this memory forever.

She will be gone soon. Death will await her, and she will embrace it when they come to collect her.

The song finishes and her oldest mumbles incoherently under his breath. She will simply kiss their foreheads and wish that one day, they will be able to play the song back to her. One learns the violin and is a copy of his father. The other learns guitar and has a voice like her own. And one is made of innocence and will ask for her to sing the song before he sleeps.

She hopes that when she is gone, her sons will play the melody for him. One will take out his violin, and the other will sing and will finish the song when her youngest is asleep.

Somewhere else, someday later, the song ends incomplete.

Chapter End Notes

hey everyone!

the chapter is split up into two mainly because of formatting and the quick change of perspectives in the second part.

will get more intense. a couple more clues dropped in this chapter :))

Red Banquet (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

His words are sharp like blades, and he grips Tommy's shoulders tightly. "Do not leave my sight! We will fight together, and if you see an academy assassin, you will not stop to fight them – you will call for me, and we'll leave. Our aim isn't to take anyone down, it is to find Quackity's location in one piece. Is that clear?"

Tommy nods his head.

Dream grips his shoulders, almost enough that it hurts. "I need a verbal answer. Am I fucking clear?!"

"Yes, Dream." Tommy swallows.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There is a lot of blood and screaming.

Tommy shoves a man out of the way and kicks another as he spins to dodge a woman who stumbles into him. Tommy doesn't know how this has started. One moment, his ears capture onto a remembrance of his past, and the next, Dream was his side, shouting through the screams and noises.

"The Academy," Dream declares. "They're here."

Tommy does not know how the chaos has erupted in the room; he does not know when it will finish either. What he does know is that he will be killed if he cannot defend himself and do anything. So, he dodges the people who attack him and swings his knife at people who jump at him.

At first, his mind goes to his identity. He assumes that they know he is Theseus; they have come to collect him. But it does not make sense, as he is concealed by a mask and the people around him are fighting each other. Chaos ensues and they are caught in the wildfire.

Tommy cannot focus on his thoughts though, as there is a man in front of him with nails of knives. He dodges successfully and jumps onto the man's back to shove his head into the ground. Tommy goes falling, ignoring the burn of his knees as he scrapes the carpet, as he pins the man down, and takes out his other knife to point at his forehead. Before he can think of anything, he hears Dream's voice, and harsh hands push him to let go.

"We need to get out of here!" Dream shouts in Spanish. "We will find Sapnap and run!"

"We can't leave," Tommy flickers open both his knives and rubs the stain of blood from his cheek. "The Academy will know we're here."

But it does not make sense. The Academy's actions do not make sense.

They dodge past fighting bodies, to the back of the stage. Dream leans against the wall and Tommy takes off his mask to breathe. “Why the fuck are they here? Who even is?”

“Three agents and an Instructor,” Dream gulps for air, his heart soaring. “I don’t think they were here for us.”

“Then who are they here for?” Tommy shouts.

“The Academy attends the Red Banquet rarely, it’s usually for business deals. I suspect – due to Sapnap, George, and I not being able to complete missions and bring in profit, they’ll be putting Graduated students for hire.”

“Then what’s going on?” Tommy gulps, asking if The Academy is not responsible for the fire of people outside – then who is.

Dream takes out his earphones and tosses one to Tommy. He then double-taps the piece. “Antfrost? Are you there?”

“I’m inside,” Tommy notices how there is a struggle in his voice, as he is likely fighting off others. “Slime figured it out. The food was tampered and drugged with; enough inside to kill a person.”

“What?” Tommy mutters in disbelief.

“Tommy!” Antfrost hears his voice. *“The Academy is here; you have to leave. If they recognize you–”*

“They won’t,” Tommy promises and puts on his mask. He stands up and watches Dream, whose mask covers his expression. Tommy assumes he is blank-faced and deep in thought. “What does the food have to do with anything?”

“Well,” Antfrost groans. *“Fuck – get off me!... There was an attempt at murder. When someone realized, it started chaos.”*

“Are there any safe exits?” Dream asks.

“Not to my knowledge, Halo is nowhere to be seen. This is uncontrollable though, it’s every agency for themselves here. I haven’t seen Quackity yet, though – I assume he’s on a higher level with Phil, to finalize their agreements.”

Dream nods his head at Tommy, and he stands straight. “We’ll find them, Antfrost.”

“Stay safe,” The man grunts. *“No one is holding back – and avoid the Academy agents. There are three of them and they’ve joined in. You can’t get near them.”* Antfrost knows Dream and Tommy can take them, he is not worried about that. What he is concerned about is their recognizable nature and their location being detected. As far as they know, The Academy is not here for them.

The revelation allows Tommy to breathe better. But another problem arises; the madness outside.

Tommy tosses the earpiece back to Dream, and he says goodbye to Antfrost, before shoving them in his pockets. Before Tommy can leave the back of the stage in preparation to use his knives and fists, Dream pulls him back.

His words are sharp like blades, and he grips Tommy’s shoulders tightly. “Do not leave my sight! We will fight together, and if you see an academy assassin, you will not stop to fight them – you

will call for me, and we'll leave. Our aim isn't to take anyone down, it is to find Quackity's location in one piece. Is that clear?"

Tommy nods his head.

Dream grips his shoulders, almost enough that it hurts. "I need a verbal answer. Am I fucking clear?!"

"Yes, Dream." Tommy swallows.

Sixteen and Fourteen return. They are Theseus and Dream, and they are also partners in crime. Dream had always had George, but he had Tommy too. They completed missions together and would have lived a life of kills and murder if they had not left The Academy when they did.

As soon as they exit the safeness of backstage, a man charges towards Dream. He has a knife out, and Dream dodges without hesitation, to then swipe the knife out of his grasp and throwing it their way. Tommy comes face to face with a woman his height. She holds her dress, so she does not trip on the length of her skirt, and her fighting style is elegant and sharp. Tommy counters her attack, having learned such grace when practicing the female students of The Academy.

(He cannot remember them well. They are brought to face off one day, and some students meet death in the process. They leave the next day.)

The woman does not expect Tommy to pull his leg to stumble and kick her to the floor. He pins her arms down, and she uses her legs to knee him in the stomach. Tommy ditches her, back at Dream's side who is fighting against two other agents at the same time. It will be easy for the older, but Tommy decides to help him out, throwing himself onto the one behind Dream and shoving him onto the floor. The man groans at impact, and Tommy throws a knife into the oak floor, which barely grazes their ear. Dream has floored the other man and nods in Tommy's direction. They are swift like assassins and fight like they were once taught.

Tommy almost gets himself into a hard predicament with two men, both double the size of him. They growl and their faces are red from blood, their masks discarded. One has a knife and does not think twice when throwing it towards Tommy's shoulder. But Tommy can dodge a knife and catch many with his eyes closed. He grabs the blade by his fingers and aims it back at the man.

Dream fights another pair of assassins next to him, who own blank, white masks with small holes poked in their eyes. He does not struggle, but Tommy almost throws himself into their battle when one grabs his shoulders and pulls him down. Dream deals with it well, but then there is a graze on Tommy's shoulder, as thick arms wrap around him.

The man he has thrown a knife at grabs him harshly, and his face is anything but nice looking. Tommy pushes his grip away and fails. There is sudden pain in his left shoulder, and then he feels blood.

He sees it too, then. His skin spills with the red liquid, staining through his white shirt into his crimson color blazer. He would have joked that it was a good thing he was wearing full red clothing – but considering he has been stabbed through his skin with a blade, he thinks against the joke for now.

Tommy groans and grits his teeth. His tongue bleeds from the pressure he has placed on it, to stop from letting out a yelp. Tommy doesn't have to rely on himself to pull the large man away from him, as Dream has seen his situation, and targets the maskless man immediately.

Tommy manages to stumble away, as Dream lays consecutive punches and throws to his body, taking out his knife to repay what he has to Tommy.

Tommy has felt worse pain before, he reminds himself. He does not let an unusable arm work as a disadvantage and uses his knife to slash between the skin of another man's face who approaches him. The harsh sting grows, and Tommy pulls the knife out of his shoulder, for crimson blood to spill.

He does not care. He is a former assassin of The Academy and has felt the pain of fires and death. He has drowned and has been stabbed more times than he has broken bones. Tommy will be fine.

The blood stains deeper into his blazer, however, the clothing is the last thing on Tommy's mind, as he throws it away, due to the restraint of his arms. Dream had taken his blazer off before, and currently squares a man in the nose. Tommy clutches to his shoulder and kicks a person who charges towards him.

Then, to the side of him, he sees danger strike.

A boy with skills as of his own, a knife in his hand as he cuts a man with a green mask in front of him, who attempts to fight. His technique is clean, and his weapon use is recognizable. Tommy does not have to glance at him again, to know the boy is from The Academy.

He has a mask, similar to Tommy's old one. It's a thin layer of disguise, yet Tommy can still notice he is a part of the place he was raised. The boy raises a knife to one man's ear, while his other elbow pushes into another's face. It is almost mesmerizing, to see a student in their habitat, between chaos and the sight of destruction. The Academy students will always end out on top.

Tommy almost leaps towards the boy. He almost pulls out his secondary set of knives to prepare for a battle. He needs to prove to himself, that he is enough. That he can take down a Graduate and is enough to pass the final exam. Only the best assassins succeed, and he wants to prove by taking this one down – that he is.

But Dream grips his right shoulder and pulls him away. "Theseus," the forbidden name bubbles in Dream's throat, because the situation they are in, reminds Dream so much of before. "Hurry up."

Tommy's eyes reach away from The Academy's assassin and meet Dream's masked face. Dream is his mentor and leader. He teaches him everything he needs to know and will be there to protect him. Tommy listens to him, because he knows what he is doing and because Dream is the person he trusts most.

They rush away. Tommy gulps for air and ignores his shirt, soaked with sweat and blood. He forces his eyes away. "The stairway is close." Dream tells him before a group of people head their way, and they must fight.

Tommy comes face to face with a black-masked man with red eyes. The look is enough to give Tommy chills, and he knows that this won't be such an easy battle to win, with an injured shoulder. But if anything, The Academy has taught him, is that nothing is a disadvantage if they are a better fighter, a faster thinker, and a better learner.

Black Mask has a row of knives on his belt. Tommy picks it up immediately and knows that that's his strength. For Tommy, it is his too. He has always excelled at knife work, and it took years to get to the position he is today. They spin at his fingertips and edge towards the exact part of the wood he aims at.

Black Mask grabs one of his knives and hurls it at Tommy. The man notices right away his injured shoulder, and he probably smirks. Tommy slides in the opposite direction, making sure that Dream is in his range before he charges at Black Mask with three knives within his fingers. Black Mask pulls out a longer one, and his fingers flick as the object flies in the air and aims towards Tommy's shoulder. The boy flips, with a stumble for a landing, due to his lack of use of one of his arms. His shoulder pains, but he pulls himself up with his left hand, and fights through the pain. Tommy then takes out another knife from his pocket and aims it at Black Mask's shoulder. He doesn't see it in time and flinches back as the blade tears into his skin.

Tommy does not allow him to regain his footing and charge again. Instead, he can finally put the extent of his knife skills to the test. Dream beside him throws someone off the banister and screams at Tommy to follow.

Tommy's arms throw the knives that rest on his fingertips. The fatigue settles, and he almost collapses when the spike of energy focuses on throwing them at the man. Black Mask is pushed against the wall, and the blades splinter into the wooden walls next to him. Two are centered by his ears, and another, an inch above his head.

Tommy almost collapses then. The adrenaline and energy that has been used up, leaves his body and finishes with an exhausted soul, seconds away from unconsciousness. Dream slides down the staircase and assists him upwards.

"We have to go, Tommy!" He shouts and shakes the boy's chin, so he focuses on his words. "Listen to me, kid!"

Tommy fights the exhaustion and follows the last hope of Dream's words. He allows himself to be tugged up the stairs, to come to a silent floor, away from the shattering and screams. It is a bliss of silence.

Tommy doesn't realize he's sitting on the floor until Dream kneels beside him. "Let me check your shoulder." He doesn't wait for an answer, moving towards Tommy's left, adjusting to the horrific sight. "Does it hurt?"

"No," he says strictly. He recalls the times the Teachers would question their students if they hurt or complained. They'd be slapped on the wrist if they agreed.

"Tommy," Dream says carefully. "You can be honest."

Tommy sighs and squeezes his eyes. "A little."

Dream nods his head and takes off Tommy's tie to wrap around the wound, as his own is discarded someplace unknown. Tommy chuckles, tipping his head back as Dream secures the tie between the blood. "Guess the tie came in hand, then."

Dream manages to let out a small smile. "Maybe you won't complain next time you have to put one on." He doesn't put too much pressure, but enough so that the blood won't flow. He then helps Tommy stand up. "I know where Quackity will be. Let's go."

Dream is not lying when he states he knows of Quackity's whereabouts. It's not too long of a journey, but Tommy finds himself stumbling and tripping over his feet from nausea that spreads through him. Dream holds him tight and promises he won't let go.

When they see Punz in a hallway, Dream calls for him. Punz turns his head slightly, and his eyes widen a fraction.

“Are they inside?” Dream asks, but he knows the real answer. There isn’t a reason why Punz would be guarding an unattended room. Tommy opens his eyes and meets the color red.

“Yes, they are,” Punz responds. “Are you sure—”

Dream cuts him off and turns to his brother. “You are Theseus,” They will not refer to him as Tommy, to conceal his identity. His disguise helps, but inside the room, he is Theseus again. “And I am XD.” Tommy does not know where Dream has gotten his nickname from – he doesn’t particularly care either. Punz opens the door for them, and the two assassins walk inside.

Tommy’s ears ring when they step into the room. He hears someone talking.

Quackity stands, Sapnap by his side. A figure is behind him. On the other side of the room, is Karl and Slime. Karl grimaces in their direction, likely targeted at the wound on Tommy’s shoulder, while Slime gives them a small wave.

Tommy’s eyes travel around to the opposite side of the room, where there is also a taller boy, who Tommy knows is Ranboo. His black and white disguise him well, and his nervous stance displays his inexperience.

But the man standing next to him is who makes Tommy’s heart stop. Technoblade stands with a sword hanging loosely between his fingers. As soon as Tommy’s eyes connect his, he almost stops breathing. He has not seen him in a long time, and Techno stands tall, with a sense to intimidate the room. Tommy gups when his red eyes connect with his, through his pink mask.

Maybe he can tell, Tommy thinks. He knows he is Tommy.

“We have guests,” The man that Tommy can’t see, says toughly.

Quackity turns. His skin is stained red, but he stands comfortable in his golden clothing. He stands up straighter, at the appearance of Tommy and Dream.

“XD,” Quackity greets. “Meet Phil.”

Quackity steps aside, and Tommy meets Phil’s eyes for the first time.

Phil’s are blue, like his own. But his face is covered by his green mask, and he wears dark-colored robes, shades of green and black lining. As Tommy watches him – he feels different. As if some part he’s forgetting or met this man somewhere. But the thought is gone before he can think into it, as Phil speaks.

“Who is the kid?” He questions, but Tommy is too tired to respond to the comment. And because Dream would want him to stay silent in a moment like this. “Well?”

“That does not concern you at the moment, Phil,” Quackity glares and his voice is sharp. Tommy thinks he’s going to faint from the blood loss any moment now. He grips onto Dream’s arm tightly, as he feels his feet crumble. Dream doesn’t mention it. “Well? Are you going to agree to this arrangement?”

“Phil,” Technoblade steps forward, and his sword glimmers. “Quackity is no use to us. There is nothing he knows that we don’t by now.”

“Well then,” Quackity interrupts before Phil can say anything. “I had a feeling you were going to bring that up, Blade.” His voice edges into another emotion, Tommy hasn’t heard in his voice before. Old friendship, to new enemies. Tommy wonders if they once they each other well. “XD

here – was a student of The Academy.”

Ranboo almost jumps in shock, and Techno’s glassy eyes snap to Dream’s. He stares into his soul as if he depicts the truth from the disguise that hides him. Tommy has not met Phil before, but he’s met Technoblade and knows enough to say that his position is valued and that the words out of his mouth next can make or break anything.

“Prove it.”

Quackity sighs – Sapnap interrupts.

“With all due respect, Technoblade,” Sapnap dares. “I think there’s a lot more we know that you do not.”

Quackity grins, Sapnap smirks. “We will find those agents with you – and we’ll assist with whatever you are willing to do.” Arrest them, Tommy thinks bitterly. Because they don’t see past the children from the murders they were forced to complete. They ignore that and will bring a so-called justice that the students cannot control. That at some point – he himself, could not control.

“You’re the opposite team here, Quackity,” Technoblade snaps. “We can’t trust a word out of your mouth, after the lies you’ve spoken.” He raises the sword he holds, and Sapnap swiftly moves in front of Quackity.

“I won’t try anything,” Sapnap hisses. “We have seven trained agents in here. You’re outnumbered.”

“Seven?” Phil asks oddly and stares at Tommy.

The underestimation came first, it always did. It gave Tommy an upper hand because he was never the tallest or strongest. He isn’t built like Dream and does not have a strict face like George. He doesn’t even have eyes that burn like Sapnap’s do – to prove that he is as fearless and cunning as they are. But then they see him fight, they see his knives and training, and are proven wrong.

“You are outnumbered,” Quackity repeats Sapnap’s words. “As good as you think Technoblade is – XD has the training of The Academy. He isn’t the only one from The Academy in this room.”

Phil holds his breath and Techno’s deadly eyes survey each person in the room.

Quackity continues, “The Academy will not be easy to take down. Their best-performing assassins are on our side, willing to take them down with us. It’s up to you – if you will join us.”

Techno stares at Karl, whose face is watching, yet he is unskilled and watches hesitantly. His eyes dart to Slime, and then to XD. He stops at Sapnap, who smirks and cocks his head to the side, menacingly. Sapnap can be threatening when he wants to be.

Techno knows Sapnap is the second assassin without needing to ask. He thinks of the third. Tommy notices the question in his eyes, the speculation.

His eyes stop at Tommy.

“It seems we don’t have a choice,” Phil resigns. “However, I won’t give up the loyalty of my agency just yet. We’ll have conditions.”

Quackity grins. A loud grin, to show off he has won this battle, without the presence of a sword like Techno’s, or a single weapon. He pulls off his mask, almost mockingly. “And what are these

conditions you suggest?”

“My agency cannot trust your own,” Phil deadpans. “We know your capabilities, Quackity. It is obvious what you’re known for.”

Tommy glances at Dream and spikes an eyebrow. Dream nods his head, thinking the same thing – what did Phil know about Quackity that they did not?

“For every meeting, you will be discussing your plans – we will come. Your agency will have a free ground for my agents, and in return, ours for yours.”

“Phil–” Technoblade almost stops him.

Quackity laughs with question. “Why would I agree to allow your agents on Las Nevadas? You are requesting the impossible, Philza.”

“Your groups are infamous for their resources. And you have fewer agents than us, it will allow proper training. If we will be working together – then proper training will be applied.”

Quackity rolls his eyes and mumbles Spanish words under his breath, Tommy would be able to pick up if he was closer.

“Very well,” Quackity resigns. “Although we will complete the conditions another day. Do we have ourselves a deal, Philza?” He sticks out a hand and leans forward, raising an eyebrow tauntingly.

Phil takes it. They shake.

They leave the room silently afterward. Tommy’s brain is foggy and his mind circles with questions of the recent events. Dream whispers in his ear, in Latin, “We’ll get your shoulder checked soon, kid.”

Punz steps away from the door, watching each agent and individual exit threateningly. He dares someone to come forward with a weapon, as he will retaliate without warning.

“Before we leave,” Phil announces. “We would like a word with XD.”

“I’m afraid I can’t let that happen,” Quackity refuses.

“Why not?” Phil raises an eyebrow. “We are business partners after all. He is from The Academy; he can handle himself.”

Quackity presses his lips together and nods his head with hesitation. He tells Punz, Slime, and Karl to leave. Ranboo nods at Phil and follows slowly behind them. Dream whispers at Sapnap and Tommy in Arabic, “Sapnap go with Quackity. Downstairs is not safe yet, and I can’t trust that everyone will stay out of trouble. Antfrost is outside, waiting.”

“And Theseus?” Sapnap whispers quickly back.

“He will stay with me,” Dream says. “His shoulder is injured, I’ll protect him.”

Tommy ignores his words, and Sapnap smirks, before leaving.

Philza and Techno watch them mysteriously, and Tommy – past his hazy mind and tired state, can read them well. Techno seems so closed off, the other times he has met him when it is easy to say what he’s thinking and feeling at the current state of time.

“Well?” Dream asks, crossing his shoulders.

Technoblade throws a knife from his pocket.

Tommy sees it before he throws. He catches up with his left arm, an instinct. Although it does not help that his left shoulder is the one that is hurt, and he drops the weapon in retaliation.

“You both are from The Academy,” Phil concludes. “How much is Quackity paying?”

“Not a cent,” Dream glares. “What did you want to speak about?”

“Quackity’s intentions,” Phil frowns. “Although there may be a few more things I am willing to discuss with you.”

“The thing is, Philza – Phil?” Dream asks the term of referral but drops it. “Quackity is the one with who you hold a connection. You depend on his loyalty, not mine, to succeed. I owe you nothing.”

“And what about you?” Phil eyes Tommy, and his blue eyes watch him like a hawk. “Your name?”

Tommy does not say. He remains silent, and Dream speaks for him. “None of us owe you anything. We are willing to team with you – to take down The Academy, and that is all.”

“To take down The Academy?” Techno tests. “Is that what you really want?”

It’s what *they* want, Tommy knows. So, they must play their game and pretend.

“Is this all?” Dream sighs, lazily. “We have a business to attend to.”

“Of course, XD,” Phil smiles, and for the first time today, he takes off his green mask.

Tommy wonders why Dream doesn’t walk off. Why he doesn’t nod his head Phil’s way and follow Quackity’s exit. Tommy stands there, with no understanding of the situation. When he peers over at Dream’s facial expression, he sees nothing but shock, to only be concealed.

“Yeah, okay,” Dream coughs, and grips Tommy’s good shoulder. “Let’s go, Theseus.”

Dream does not realize the mistake until it is too late. Dream does not make mistakes, nor does he allow slip-ups.

But he does. “*Theseus?*” Techno whispers in disbelief and Philza’s eyes visibly widen.

“Quackity was not lying when he said some of us were from there,” Dream holds Tommy closer.

“Theseus,” Philza repeats, and Tommy’s eyes move to him who just stares.

“Philza,” Dream scorns. “We will be off.” Tommy realizes – the reward set on him, has come to Phil’s knowledge. Quackity had not mentioned Tommy before, so Philza only finds out now that he is the student who has a reward of one hundred thousand dollars on his skull. It is a guess that Quackity decided last minute not to let his name be known. But now Dream has accidentally slipped up – and Phil knows.

“I wouldn’t dare do anything,” Dream’s eyes burn, likely like the sight of The Academy in its final moments. “You had made an alliance with Quackity. The rest of us hold no pact with you and your agency. You do not want to mess with us.”

They leave. Tommy turns his head before they turn the corner, to see a set of blue eyes, another set of red on him. One stares at him in wonder, the other shocked.

Tommy's head hurts.

Technoblade remembers his younger brother.

He remembers a small boy, with soft eyes and a passion for the future. They would say Theseus would be like him one day – but he was always Wilbur's second. Not that Techno minded, he didn't want his kid brother following in his footsteps. Of danger and threat, and a life of hazard and weapons.

He meets Theseus six years later, and he is everything he wished he wasn't.

"Phil," Technoblade does not shout at Philza. He whispers his words with a vengeance and dares for him to say otherwise. "You knew."

"I did not know," Phil stares where the boy once was. They did not see his face, but they remember his name. *Theseus*, named by Technoblade himself. "I knew he was alive."

"And you didn't tell me," Technoblade scoffs, and his voice is louder. "You didn't tell me that Theseus was still alive?"

"I didn't know," Phil repeats. "I didn't know he'd be here." They collapse into wooden, sturdy chairs and they think. Because that's all they can do.

Technoblade feels like he is falling.

His brother is alive – *Theseus is alive*. Yet, he is not the boy he once remembers. He is not the innocent kid, who'd stare at him with stars in his eyes, and small wishes for the future.

Technoblade suddenly feels very angry.

"The Academy?" He laughs, but it hurts. "He was taken to a fucking *death* institute."

"He's here now," Phil says softly. "He's safe."

"He isn't fucking safe, Phil. Not in a world like this," Technoblade chuckles emptily and stands up to kick his hair. "Six years, Phil! He was there for *six years*!"

Theseus is only ten when he is taken. And now he is sixteen.

Technoblade punches a wall. His arm flies through before he can think. He will scream, he can't hold back. But that kid, shouldn't have stared at him so guarded, or stood so still. His shoulder had been bleeding through, and the kid rarely reacted. Technoblade feels so much anger he can't contain. He pulls out his sword and slashes through the wall. He is furious.

He pushes chairs over and punches another wall. Phil watches as he causes limited destruction until the room is turned over and there is nothing left but scratched walls and broken objects.

“Did you see him, Phil?” Techno pulls his mask to the floor and his long hair flies loose. “The way he looked at us? Did you see it?”

“I did,” Phil says. “I promise you, Technoblade, and I’ll promise him too – that this will never happen again. He’ll be safe, he’ll be home.”

“He’s an assassin. He’s trained in this area,” Techno corrects him. “He’s under Quackity, he is with XD and their men. He doesn’t know anything.”

“And we won’t tell him,” Phil says, and Technoblade growls. “Not yet. We aren’t going to tell Wilbur, either.”

“Why not?” Techno snarls. “He should know.”

“Not yet,” Phil says. “I’ve taught you patience, Techno. I don’t trust Quackity – I know he’ll sign the students up for his agency as soon as he can get his hands on them. We know he doesn’t give a shit about them – he cares for his company.” They know through experience. They learn from it. “The same will apply for Theseus – Quackity will make them believe that he cares.”

“But he does not.”

“But he doesn’t,” Phil stands, and places delicate hands on his son’s shoulders. “We’ll bring Theseus home, but we can’t until he trusts us. I don’t know if that’s possible, with the boundaries he would have set in an environment like that. It won’t be easy.”

“He’s my brother, Phil,” Techno’s voice cracks.

“And he’s my son,” Phil speaks and smiles. “And he’ll be home, soon enough.”

Chapter End Notes

so much to say in this chapter note
firstly, thank you so much for reading :) appreciate all the
bookmarks/kudos/comments and just everything :))

secondly, wilbur soot has joined a03 and now we have competition. i admit i'll watch
the vod instead of read it because of how he voiced the dialogue

and lastly, i think from this chapter, that the updates won't be so consistent :(school is
starting again in a couple of days, so i won't have as much free time as i do now, to sit
and write. i'm going to say now, that the updates will likely be from one week to two
but i promise that i won't let go of this fic but it will take longer to update some
chapters than others!

other than that, would love to hear what you think of this chapter! i'm feeling a bit iffy
about it, and might come back to reword it a bit, but the reveal has (kind of?)
happened!

i'll add a red banquet summary here:

[As the Red Banquet is underway, Antfrost reports to Dream that The Academy are making an appearance. During this time, Slime figures out that the food is drugged due to his better senses. Tommy finds the musician playing a song he faintly remembers and follows it. Before it finishes, Dream finds and informs him that The Academy has arrived. Someone else has found out about the food being drugged, and all people go into a frenzy, attempting to kill/hurt one another. Dream and Tommy make it to Quackity, who makes an agreement with Phil with conditions and Quackity makes the decision to not bring Theseus up, instead XD to convince them to compromise. When they leave, Dream accidentally reveals Theseus' presence, and Phil + Techno find out he's alive}

Beginning

Chapter Summary

Quackity snorts. “Kid, with that shoulder – you’re not doing training any time soon.”

Tommy blinks. “At The Academy, I’d have to train with broken ribs and stitches.”

“I – you know what, I’m going to leave this one up to you two,” Quackity takes out his phone, muttering.

“A week,” Dream bargains.

“A day,”

“Five days,”

“A day,” Tommy repeats.

Dream rolls his eyes. “Two weeks, then.”

“Five days,” Tommy relents.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy remembers many of the injuries he received from The Academy. Of course, he has too many scars and burns littered on his skin to count, but there are a few that he recalls getting when he closes his eyes.

There is a long scar across his forehead, that he usually covers with his curly hair. When he pulls his hair back, the thin line is noticeable from afar. He receives it during a hand-to-hand spar when his opponent took out a knife and sliced his face. Dream had been present and pulled the boy away before slapping his face. He is Two and never seen again, afterward. They raise assassins, not cheaters.

The burns on his palms are from when his class would place their hands on fire and forced them to keep them there. Although the burns have healed, there are marks of where they once were.

There are also Tommy’s stitches and wounds from the procedures the lab-coated people did to him.

So, Tommy is used to the marks. He’s used to the burns, scars, and stitches. He grows up with them, they remind of him who he once was and still is.

Tommy doesn’t understand why they are making a big fuss about his shoulder, then. He’s had worse experiences – truly worse – and Quackity, Dream, Sapnap, and Karl crowd into a room and watch him carefully. Although Quackity and Karl seem nervous and on edge, his brothers don’t lose the look on their faces.

“They’ll give you a drug,” Karl reassures, although maybe the reassurance is aimed at himself.
“So, you won’t feel a thing.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and sits back in the hospital bed. Quackity has a clinic in *Las Nevadas*, with some of the best doctors apparently. He doesn’t know how many times he has to tell him that he can apply the stitches himself, and it would be a shame for the skill to be wasted.

“I don’t need the drug,” Tommy refuses.

“Are you sure?” Karl’s voice raises. “You’ll have quite a lot of stitches, the wound isn’t small, Tommy.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Sapnap, can you knock some sense into your boyfriend?”

Sapnap does not say anything. The traitor.

“I’m fine,” Tommy insists. “Dream and Sapnap know this already – I’ve applied stitches countless times before. This isn’t even the deepest wound I’ve had. I had to stitch up the back of my leg once during a mission. I could do that shit with my eyes closed.”

A doctor walks in then, and Quackity sighs in relief. “We just want to help, Tommy.”

“I don’t need the help!” The doctor nods their head in Quackity’s direction and pulls on their gloves to access the damage.

Tommy tenses. “Stop.”

“Tommy,” Quackity starts. “We told you–”

“No,” Tommy doesn’t like hands on him he doesn’t know, and the lab coat that the man next to him wears. He doesn’t like how his skin is touched by someone he does not trust, and the bed he lays in feels uncomfortable. “Stop touching me,”

Tommy meets Dream’s eyes, and they do not need words spoken for Dream to understand the plead. “Stop,”

Quackity turns to him and glares. “Dream,” he deadpans. The doctor pulls away and Tommy breathes again.

Sapnap comes to the realization next. His eyes darken and his eyes meet Tommy’s blue. “I can do it if you want.”

“Or I can do it myself.”

“Tommy,” Dream says strictly, before turning to the doctor. “Sapnap and I will apply to stitches.” He whispers in the man’s ear, and Tommy stares at the floor until he leaves the room again. He gulps.

Dream and Sapnap stand beside him, where the doctor had originally stood. Quackity’s arms are folded, and Karl seems nervous. Dream explains to them, “Tommy doesn’t have a good experience with...”

“No, no, I understand,” Quackity says quickly, and Tommy assumes he knows to an extent. Dream and Sapnap would not have told him about his past experiences – they respect his wishes to not. Although he may conclude himself. “How can we help?”

“Keep him company,” Sapnap grins. “Can’t have the kid getting bored and moving around.”

“Shut the fuck up, Sapnap,” Tommy mutters. “You’re a bitch.”

Dream washes his hands and pulls on surgical gloves. He takes out the equipment he needs and cleans it before use. Tommy watches his face, how he seems so focused and concentrated. “So, Tommy,” he turns to the younger boy. “Who’s going to do it? Sapnap or I?”

Tommy tenses and stares at his older brother. “And I can’t do it myself?”

“I know you can, but considering one arm is out of use, I’d prefer one of us to,” Dream does not undermine his experience and efforts of his past. He simply says the truth and gives Tommy the option between the two.

“You, then,” Tommy sighs reluctantly.

“Okay,” Dream nods his head. Quackity and Karl pull stools in front of the bed and Sapnap assists Dream. “I’m going to give you an anesthetic to numb the area. I’ll give you *Tylenol* after.”

“No,” Tommy shakes his head. “That shit makes me drowsy, and I need to train.”

Quackity snorts. “Kid, with that shoulder – you’re not doing training any time soon.”

Tommy blinks. “At The Academy, I’d have to train with broken ribs and stitches.”

“I – you know what, I’m going to leave this one up to you two,” Quackity takes out his phone, muttering.

“A week,” Dream bargains.

“A day,”

“Five days,”

“A day,” Tommy repeats.

Dream rolls his eyes. “Two weeks, then.”

“Five days,” Tommy relents.

Dream starts. Tommy stares at a blank wall as he does, Quackity and Karl’s voices in his ears and his brothers’ mumbling between. He trusts them with his life, yet as the fingers prod, and the needles touch his skin, he is reminded of the past – when they would inject chemicals into him and promise he’d be better soon.

Over time, he recalls the experiments taking longer. The doctor’s sheets filled with more notes and longer periods, of laying in the lonely room with glass and white walls. There was no TV, only his mind to keep him company.

When the experiments stop, Tommy can still feel their fingers raze against his skin at night. He can hear their hushed whispers and the machines beeping behind him.

“Tommy?” Sapnap snaps him out of it. “You, okay?”

Tommy hums, turning to him. “What?”

Sapnap frowns. “You haven’t spoken in a while, that’s all.”

“I was just... thinking.” Tommy stares at his right shoulder, where Dream is almost halfway done. “You’re so slow.”

“And you’re impatient.”

“Tommy,” Karl begins a conversation. “How did you meet Sapnap?”

Tommy meets his eyes and furrows his eyebrows. “What?”

Karl’s cheeks tint pink and Sapnap snorts and hands Dream scissors.

“I mean,” Karl says lightly. “You guys aren’t really brothers, right? How did you two meet at the um, The Academy?”

Quackity looks up from his phone, genuinely curious as well. Tommy knows their story, or at least, some part of it, of how Sapnap had lied to them about who he was and his background during a mission, to only confess the truth over the phone afterward. But they don’t his.

“Tommy’s my brother,” Sapnap says, about to punch his right shoulder lightly until Dream sends him a warning glance. His arms drop by his side, instead.

“Well,” Tommy thinks about his answer carefully. “I met Dream first, and through him, I met Sapnap. I was in a class, and they had been watching, I guess. Observing, since they were Graduates. Dream talked to me afterward, was a prick, I might add. I didn’t think he cared or anything, or if it was a one-time thing. But he stuck around, even if I didn’t want him to. Then he introduced me to Sapnap and George.” When Tommy mentions George, he deflates a little and so does the room. “Sapnap hated me at first, even though I did nothing to the fucker.”

“Hey!”

“Shut up Sapnap, it’s my turn to talk,” Tommy taunts. “Anyway – before I was rudely interrupted – Sapnap lead a couple of my lessons. Mainly sparring classes because he’s shit at everything else. He’d go harder on me, sometimes, and I think he started being less of a dick when he realized I could handle it and stuck around longer.”

“Sapnap,” Dream deadpans.

“Tommy isn’t saying the full story,” Sapnap laughs nervously at Dream’s glare. “I didn’t go harder on him; I simply didn’t go easier just because he was friends with Dream. Usually, the kids who talked to him wanted an easier way out of the lessons. When I realized Tommy wasn’t, then I stopped.”

“You would throw knives at me during classes,” Tommy rolls his eyes. “You gave me two black eyes – at the same time, once. And you made me recite Greek when we trained together.”

In Greek, Sapnap argues, “You needed all the help you could get.”

Tommy responds in the language, “Fuck you,”

“Stop moving Tommy,” Dream grumbles. “I’m almost done.”

“Tell Sapnap my Greek is fine!”

Dream sighs long and loud. “Sapnap, his Greek is fine.”

“Can you teach us?” Karl smiles. “I mean if you want – so I can understand you. Of course, you can say no but–”

“Okay,” Sapnap says immediately, and they have weird signals in their eyes that Tommy pulls a disgusted face at. Hearing Dream and George flirt all the time was enough as it was.

Dream is almost done at his stitches, and Quackity must leave for a meeting regarding the more legal side of *Las Nevadas*. He promises that he’ll be back the following night and will give the trio a tour of their new residence on the grounds. As he says so – Tommy almost forgets that they’ll be leaving the apartment forever.

Dream finishes finally and pulls on a nonstick bandage around the stitches.

“Looks good,” Karl muses, noticing Dream’s careful skills before he will cover it up. “Is there anything you guys can’t do?”

Tommy snorts. Sapnap and he start a list. “We can’t sleep in a room with someone we can’t trust.”

“We can’t wake up late, our minds are wired to wake up at six,”

“We can’t get attached to people easily.”

“We’ll take threats seriously, we can’t identify jokes well,”

“Okay, okay,” Karl pulls his hands up. “Never mind, then.”

“Tommy,” Dream says, leading him away from the conversation going on. “Here, I’ll get you a glass of water.” Dream holds a tablet of *Tylenol* and Tommy scowls. “Take it,”

“Do I have to?” Tommy complains.

“Yeah,” Dream is overbearing and annoying, but Tommy will listen to him this once. He swallows it dry, even if Karl goes to fetch him a tall glass of water.

“Take a nap,” Sapnap pulls Tommy’s hair out of his face.

Tommy glances at Karl wearily, who enters the room with water. He likes Karl, he thinks he’s good for his brother and makes him happy – which is enough for Tommy, but that doesn’t mean he can fully trust him. Tommy doesn’t think he’ll be able to trust anyone enough to sleep with their presence (apart from Dream and Sapnap) in a long time.

“We’ll be here,” Sapnap promises. Dream hums in agreement next to him. “Go to sleep.”

Tommy lays back, and he’s asleep not long after his head touches the softness of the cushion.

Dream’s eyes rest on Tommy, as his chest rises and falls and his soft breaths as he lays

unconscious. Sapnap is seated on the chair on the other side of him, on his phone, and occasionally glancing up at him. They sit in silence, and occasionally whisper to each other, as they do not want to wake him up.

Karl leaves for training at some point, with Antfrost. He asks if either of them wants to come with him, but both of them refuse.

Dream notices how Tommy seems younger in his sleep. How he doesn't seem like the sixteen-year-old assassin he was once, burdened with a life of murder. He does not seem like he should be able to pick up a knife or use a gun, yet he is fully capable and knows how. The kid by them should be in high school friends, and his biggest worry should be completing homework – not a whole organization of trained assassins ready to take him out. They will kill him, and Tommy is only sixteen.

Sapnap is thinking the same thing, or maybe he's gotten too good at reading Dream's face. "He's too young."

Dream nods lightly. "He is."

"I hate this," Sapnap declares, a little louder. "Trusting an enemy team – ones who don't want us around. Or taking our chances with the relocation, or possibility of The Academy succeeding."

"We won't let them."

"And if they still do?" Sapnap tilts his head upwards, at the stoned tiles on the ceiling. His eyes scan them as if he counts each one. "What if they rebuild the white room? What if they'll make him kill again?" Sapnap and he have made a silent pact that they will kill if they must. They will make sure Tommy does not have to, however, ever again.

"It'll take them a long time to rebuild it," Dream reassures.

"If one of us is captured," Sapnap says, deadly. "They'll lock us in the room until we forget everyone, including ourselves. We'll forget each other, Dream."

Dream cannot remember his turn in the white room well. It is a blur. Neither George's. Sapnap's experience is quite clearer, he had pretended the room had not hurt him as much as it did, but Dream watched as he crumbled in front of his eyes. Tommy was worse, Tommy had been scared to lose them, and stuck with them when he could. Tommy is not quiet when he is alone with them, but he had been quiet for a long time.

Dream had caught Tommy whispering a couple of times when he – Theseus back then – had not thought he could hear. "*George, Sapnap, Dream,*" he would murmur lightly, and Dream's heart would *hurt*.

"We'll forget George too," Sapnap then says, and their eyes meet each other. The only thing keeping George alive, is their minds. And if they take away their memories of him, then George will be gone forever.

Dream dislikes that thought a lot. He hates it. He will punch a few more holes in a couple of other walls, but he steadies his fists and wills himself to calm down.

"I don't get nervous," Sapnap then says. "But I am nervous about what will happen."

"I am too," Dream admits, and they sit in silence, Tommy's light breaths in between. "The Academy isn't the only thing on my mind. So is... Phil."

“Philza?” Sapnap questions.

“Yeah,” Dream says. “I admitted Tommy was Theseus.”

Sapnap stands up immediately and the chair behind him falls to the ground, the metal making a loud noise as it clashes with the floor. They both tense, and gaze over to the younger boy – who is thankfully, still asleep, and their conversation resumes.

“Dream!” Sapnap shouts, yet quietly. They are harsh whispers. “Phil knows Tommy. His sons do – the fuck did you do?”

“No,” Dream corrects the misinformation. “I worded it wrong – but I admitted it was him. He doesn’t know he’s Tommy.” Their words come out confusing, because of Tommy’s two names and identities. But Sapnap doesn’t take long to understand. “Quackity’s plan ensured that Phil would find out Theseus was working with them – but he didn’t mention his name.”

“Quackity thinks Phil will rat him out,” Sapnap explains. “I assume he thinks that he’ll bring Tommy forward to collect the cash reward, before arresting them. I don’t really know.”

“Something about Quackity’s story,” Dream hesitates. “It doesn’t make sense.”

Sapnap glares. “Are you doubting my boyfriend?”

“I’m doubting someone I cannot trust,” Dream corrects. “So, technically, yes.”

Sapnap sits back down. “You don’t have to trust Q, Dream, but give him a chance.” He sighs. “I want to know though when were you the one to make a mistake? *The Dream* is errorless.”

“I guess I’m changing,” And Dream finally admits the truth he has been thinking for a long time, yet is too scared to admit aloud. Even Sapnap is startled by his confession. “I guess I am making more mistakes, and getting angrier, and I’m not as strong as I used to be. But I don’t think it’s a bad thing anymore. I’m just less of an assassin – I’m more human now.”

Sapnap is silent.

“You will soon trust people,” Dream tells his brother. “We’ll be able to talk about George, happily. We’ll be able to admit we’re hurting to Tommy, even if it will be hard to show it.”

“Who knew?” Sapnap mutters. “That you were human too.”

“What?” Dream snorts. “What am I then? Alien?”

“Considerable,” And the two laugh for what feels like the first time.

Tommy does not enjoy packing, he realizes.

When he and Dream had moved around frequently, after escaping The Academy, he had kept his belongings in his old backpacks to ensure they could leave as quickly as possible. But this apartment was home for a while – a place to come home to after days at the bakery, or evenings in Dream’s office. They were only here for a couple of months, yet Tommy then understands that people are not the only attachments one can have.

Tommy doesn’t mind moving, though. But his shoulder hurts a little (not that he will admit it aloud) and he finds annoying his brothers, an easier task. So, Dream tells him to go to his bedroom – the last time he can utter the following words – to pack away his personal belongings. The real reason is so Tommy can get out of his hair and nag him every few seconds.

Tommy stares emptily at the room. The window he was so close to shattering that one time, and the side tables he had hit his head at after rolling out of bed. He goes to his wardrobe first and watches the clothes that Dream and he had gone to get the first time they moved into the town and wonders if they will pack themselves.

Apparently, they won’t, so Tommy takes out his bags and shoves them in. Although he does not remember buying all the clothes, some may belong to Dream.

Sapnap interrupts him, waltzing into his room. “Wow, you’re actually doing what Dream told you to.”

“Get out of my room,” Tommy mutters but he doesn’t mean it.

“Kid, you’re not meant to stuff them into your bag. You have to fold them, so they’ll fit. Like this.” Sapnap shows him and Tommy stares at him blankly and blinks.

Sapnap groans. “They won’t all fit inside if you just toss them in.”

Tommy just stares.

Sapnap dumps it down. “Bag. Clothes. Inside. Fold.” Tommy does not respond, and Sapnap does it for him. He empties the bag and demonstrates how to do it. “Pull the sleeves together and fold them into halves.

Tommy’s not dumb though. He knows how to fold clothes, and he knows what he had been doing before, was wrong. But now, he can lay on his white covers, while Sapnap does all the work for him. And when he finishes, Tommy smiles.

“Thanks, Sapnap,” he grins and Sapnap realizes.

“Oh, you fuck.”

Tommy lets out a very manly – of course manly – yell as he slides out of the room, slamming the door to buy him some time. He rushes around the kitchen and pulls out the kitchen knives. Dream stands in the middle of the room and glances up when Sapnap walks in with a red face from running into the door. He complains under his breath, “I want one quiet afternoon. That’s all I ask.”

“Come here, Tommy,” Sapnap orders.

“Make me bitch,” And Tommy pulls a knife upwards.

“Tommy, don’t throw knives inside the house.”

Tommy drops the knives, and bolts to the other side of the apartment room. He rushes to the other

side of the couch and realizes his mistake when Sapnap jumps over the couch.

“Sapnap, don’t tackle Tommy in the house,” Dream then says as he folds the extra towels.

Sapnap still tackles Tommy, and they roll on the floor, Sapnap pinning him down and Tommy shouting at him.

“His left shoulder, Sapnap!” Dream reminds him.

But Sapnap doesn’t headlock him or twist his arms back in revenge. Instead, he *tickles* him.

He fucking tickles him.

Tommy cackles, unsuccessfully attempting to bat Sapnap’s arms away, as he rolls over, laughing as Sapnap does. He loses his breath and yells for Sapnap to stop, but his older brother continues.

“Sapnap!” Tommy shouts. “Dream, save me!”

“Little boy,” Sapnap teases. “C’mon, I’m going easy on you Thomas.”

“You–” Tommy laughs louder. “Dream!”

“Sapnap,” Dream puffs out and shakes his head in disbelief that they’re both this childish. “Stop.”

Sapnap eventually stops once Tommy stops fighting back. The blood rushes to his head and a dash of fatigue swallows him.

“Tommy?” Sapnap’s voice changes in an instant. “What’s wrong?”

Tommy holds his breath and breathes out quickly. “Sorry, nothing.”

Dream comes to his side, and Tommy doesn’t know how he moves from the opposite of the room so quickly. “Tell me, Tommy.”

“Nothing,” Tommy reiterates. “I just lost my breath for a second.”

Sapnap and Dream glance at each other warily. “Do you want to take a breath of fresh air?”

Tommy would enjoy that a lot. He’s been so accustomed to the walls of Quackity’s medical bay, and Dream’s office, that he would enjoy some time to himself. Sapnap and Dream won’t leave him, not even when he had started training again. Very slow training, however, because of the state of his shoulder.

“Okay,” Tommy agrees. “Thanks.”

“Can you go with him, Sapnap?” And Tommy frowns. “I know you want to go alone Toms, but to be safe – yeah?”

“Yeah,” Tommy sighs but he knows Dream is correct.

“You guys can go buy lunch. I’ll try and finish up.” Dream hands them a couple of ten dollars bills and Sapnap and Tommy leave the apartment after that. Sapnap apologizes for before, and Tommy rolls his eyes and ignores the apology. He grabs Sapnap’s flipped cap and places it on his head. Sapnap doesn’t protest.

“Let’s buy spicy food,” Tommy decides and Sapnap perks an eyebrow.

“Dream hates spicy food.”

“Exactly,”

Sapnap rolls his eyes. “We’ll just get burgers. I don’t want to hear him complain all afternoon that we wasted his money.”

“Burgers are boring,” Tommy complains himself, and they leave the apartment complex.

“How about we go to the bakery you work at?” Sapnap questions. “Then we’ll get lunch and a treat afterward.”

“I quit.” Well, Tommy didn’t quit. Dream and Tommy came to a collective decision that it was the best – and safest – option considering all factors. Tommy does not know how the phone call went since it was Dream who had been the one to call Niki in the first place. He feels kind of bad for the lack of warning.

“Oh,” Sapnap says. “Well, um, that’s okay.” They decide to get sushi because Sapnap recalls a good store seeing when he had walked by the street shops. Sapnap says he’ll let Tommy order by himself, as he takes a call outside.

“Why can’t you?” Tommy groans.

“Karl called me before,” Tommy rolls his eyes and snatches the money out of his hands to step inside.

Tommy waits in line. He’d not a fast decision-maker and stares blankly through the glass at the available options. “Uh–” There are too many options to choose from.

Another person steps into the room. Tommy ignores the presence, assuming it’s Sapnap. “Um,”

“Are you going to order any time soon?”

Tommy turns his body, and his luck is just the worst.

He doesn’t know how he gets himself into these situations, because Wilbur Soot stands before him and Tommy honestly thinks at this point, Wilbur has planted a tracking device inside of him or something, because their coincidence bump-ins don’t seem so coincidental.

“Tommy?” Wilbur says in plain shock. “Tommy?”

“Hey Wil,” Tommy turns his body slowly and orders quickly. As the lady packages them into plastic containers and dumps packets of soy sauce, Wilbur stands beside him.

“I haven’t seen you in a while,” Wilbur says softly. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, I am, Wilbur,” Tommy grits his teeth and collects the food. “Thanks.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur follows him out of the store, without ordering. “Can we talk? We’re all worried – especially Tubbo since you haven’t responded to any of his texts.” Tommy sees Sapnap, leaning by a graffitied wall. “We all want to make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m fine,”

“Then look at me,” he pleads. “Please.”

Tommy sighs and does. He pulls off his cap and his curly hair bounces forward. "I'm okay, see? Can I go now?"

"We haven't heard from you in weeks, Toms, weeks," Wilbur says. "Maybe you're not used to it, but we're going to worry for you when you cut contact."

"I haven't been on my phone," Tommy lies. He has, he uses it to text Dream and Sapnap where in *Las Nevadas* he is every couple of hours, so they know. "I've just been busy."

"You can come to my house again," Wilbur offers. "We can watch another movie – Up, if you want since I know you liked it so much."

"Tommy?" Then Sapnap comes up to him and Tommy thinks, shit, this isn't going to end well. "Who's this?"

"I could ask the same thing," And Wilbur stands defensively.

Tommy glances between them like he watches a tennis match. "I'm his brother."

"Oh," And Wilbur pauses and scans Sapnap as if he can't believe Tommy was stating the truth about having another brother. "I'm Wilbur,"

"Wilbur," Sapnap greets yet his face is closed off and he stands closer to Tommy. "How do you know my younger brother?"

Wilbur glances at Tommy as he pulls on Sapnap's cap again. "We're friends."

"Are you?" Sapnap glances at Tommy for confirmation, and he rolls his eyes.

"Sure."

"The thing is," Sapnap clicks his tongue. "I haven't heard of you."

"Sapnap," Tommy mutters quickly in Greek. "Quit it, he's fine. He's uh, Phil's son."

"Tommy," Wilbur says. "I didn't know you were Greek."

"You don't know a lot about me," And Tommy regrets the words out of his mouth, instantly.

"Let's go Sapnap," He pulls his older backward, but Sapnap does not relent.

"Is he annoying you, Toms?" Sapnap doesn't call Tommy 'Toms', that's Dream. Tommy shakes his head.

"Tommy," Wilbur asks. "Can we talk?" He glances at Sapnap warily, as if he wants him to leave for the conversation.

Sapnap crosses his arms over his chest and Tommy wants to walk away. But he knows if he does, something not so pretty will occur between them. "What is there to talk about, Wilbur?" Tommy sighs, tired. He's very tired.

"I don't think he wants to talk to you," Sapnap wraps his arm around Tommy's shoulders, careful to leave his left shoulder without pressure. "You can go."

Wilbur is going to protest, but he ends up sighing and leaving. Guilt eats up Tommy's inside, and he almost pulls away from his brother to speak to Wilbur. But he's a connection that Tommy cannot afford to happen. And although Wilbur, Tubbo, and Niki was apart of his life – he can't

think about them, and he can't let them care. He's going to be working with them, undercover, and it will jeopardize his identity by getting any way closer to them.

Once Wilbur has left, Sapnap glares at Tommy. "Wilbur?"

"He was a friend at the bakery," Tommy continues in Greek as they walk back to the apartment. Sapnap takes the plastic bag of sushi from him. "And he's Phil's son so I'll be seeing him more."

"Not as Tommy," Sapnap says. "As Theseus."

He has not met them yet, but Quackity and Dream have discussed with them to keep their masks on. They will avoid it as much as possible, but they can't reveal their truths to the Syndicate.

They return to the apartment after, where Dream carries the last of the bags to the living room. What is left, is the stained furniture and old beds. "We got sushi," Sapnap declares. "We also ran into Wilbur."

"Wilbur?" Dream looks over at Tommy, knowingly. "What'd he say?"

"He wanted to talk," Tommy mimics his wording.

Dream purses his lips. "There's something about him..." But he drops the topic, and they eat.

Tommy stares at the empty room before they leave. The beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning – he isn't sure what it is yet.

Sapnap watches the agents stand in line. His eyes stay on Sixteen – Theseus.

They stand outside, the sky a deep blue and the wind a perfect day for Spring. Today they will complete the obstacle course, the new one that has been built recently. George and Dream had tested it out the other day, as some students watched. The walls they would have to climb, by using bare pieces of wood seemed somewhat daunting, and if they fell from the poles, they would have to leap over, to get through each section, a bone would be broken.

Sapnap is not scared of anything though. The course may be off the air, and the pacing must be quick, but it is possible to complete.

"In a line!" Sapnap shouts. "If you do not complete the course, then you will stand on the left. If you finish the course second to your competitor, you will as well."

Sapnap watches Theseus move into line. He knows that Dream has an eye on him, that he's Dream protégé. That doesn't mean he will go easy on him, yet.

"Go," Sapnap directs, and the first row of students begins. They stumble at the start and find trouble climbing the large wooden wall with their blistering fingers and burning hands. One student manages to drop down first, but cannot stick the landing.

The students on the side watch carefully, pinpointing every mistake and observing how they can complete each section the fastest. Some Instructors and Graduates walk by, and stick around, including George and Dream.

“How long did we take?” George smirks as the next row of students starts.

“Ten minutes,” Dream says. “I beat you by a second.” George scowls and turns away.

“None of them have come close,” Sapnap tells them. “The quickest has been fifteen minutes.”

Then it is Theseus’ turn. Sapnap notices how Dream leans forward and watches more carefully while George concentrates.

“Go!” Sapnap shouts at the two agents to start. It is Four and Sixteen. Sapnap notices how Dream smirks and George leans back, knowing this will be easy for Theseus to win. Four is known for being weak. However, he is one of the shorter agents and very fast. It assists him to jump between the craters and rushing past the beams. Theseus lacks behind and Sapnap raises his eyes at Dream.

“He will be our fourth?” He doubts.

Dream does not, however. “He will.”

Theseus regains momentum on the wooden wall. Four cannot grip onto between the cracks of the wooden slabs and does not have the strength to pull himself upwards. Theseus does and makes it up quickly. His technique is flawless, and Sapnap is slightly impressed. What Theseus does, is he grips between two planks before throwing himself as high as he can hang. He does this to get to the top, as fast as possible.

Theseus jumps down, not a perfect landing, but he is better than most. Four manages to do the same when Theseus grips onto the thick rope, almost six feet above the floor. He swings through, and Sapnap knows his hands will burn as his fingers slide down, the sweat causing his grip to loosen.

Sapnap and Dream hold their breaths as Four uses his smaller figure to climb higher, as he has less body pull upwards. Sapnap has never seen George so invested in anything before.

Theseus catches up eventually. Sand hits their feet and Four turns to see Theseus catching up. He knows, Sapnap sees in his eyes, that he can’t win. Because Theseus is stronger and more determined. So, Four digs his hands into the sand and throws a handful into Theseus’ eyes before continuing the course.

Theseus is blinded and Sapnap scowls – because he had told them that this was a fair battle, that they could not tamper with the course of the opposite side. Theseus is held back, holding his eyes and unmoving.

“Move,” Dream whispers under his breath, as if he can hear him. “*Move, Theseus.*”

And maybe Theseus can hear him because he does. He rushes forwards, tumbling while the sand behind him makes a path for his feet. He jumps over the wooden blocks and skids by Four without breaking much sweat. Sapnap sees strength in him, willpower to finish first.

It is admirable. “Time?” George asks.

“Nine minutes,” Sapnap says, and the two Graduates watch Theseus closer as he pulls forward, one of his eyes closed and the other barely squinting. Four heaves for air, and coughs for breaths. He is

stopped to watch the lead Theseus has caught on him, Sapnap thinks he will give up.

Theseus finishes in eleven minutes and thirty seconds. Dream smirks in Sapnap's direction and George watches Theseus stares in their direction as if he asks for a silent approval for *something*.

Dream and George glance at him too. Sapnap turns to the next, and final pair of students. "Go!"

"So?" George asks.

Sapnap nods his head, then turns to Theseus. It may just be a nod of his head or approval, but it's enough.

Chapter End Notes

fLUFF chapter which was one of the longest chapters of the book i think.
thank you for reading!

also maybe there's a reason how wilbur keeps bumping into tommy? just a thought :0
will spoil, next chapter will have theseus/phil/techno and wilbur :))

finished editing this while watching sapnaps lore stream wohooooo

Myself

Chapter Summary

George smiles.

He's never felt so alive before.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream is stealthy and George is smart. Sapnap can fight well with his fists and fingers. Theseus' forte is knives. He can throw them with his eyes closed, he can catch them from behind his head. He has advanced spatial awareness and possesses skills that would have taken years to achieve.

Theseus stands straight. Dream barks at him, from behind. "I'm starting!"

Dream throws knives and Theseus catches them with his fingers. By the end of their sessions, his fingers are red and ache. Dream tosses him bandages and he wraps them himself.

"Well done," Dream says at the end of a successful session. When Theseus has not performed to standards, he will not say anything. Sometimes Sapnap and George will attend and watch.

Blades are his friend, and the handles mold into his grip. He closes his eyes and tosses the weapons in the air. He throws them at targets and does not hesitate.

Dream finds of the ability first. One afternoon, he tosses Theseus an orange, which he catches mid-air, without glancing at him. He had not realized he held the fruit in his hand until Dream pointed it out.

Then it became other objects, heavier and more sudden. Dream had told Sapnap and George, and between corridors and hallways, they threw objects at Theseus when he did not expect it. At some point, he did, waiting for the moment one of their arms appear for a ball or book to hurdle his direction. They move to weapons shortly after.

One time, it is a fucking *vase*, and Theseus throws it back at Sapnap in retaliation.

They continue, and to his classmates, Theseus only has better technique with his knives. But then they are taken into a large room and Graduates, and other students sit around, and Theseus knows something is going on.

"You will spar," The Instructor says. "To death."

This is the first time they are introduced to this. It is not the last.

They may choose a weapon of their choice. Theseus' eyes land on Dream, Sapnap, and George's. He is only now, starting to get used to calling them his brothers. The word seems so foreign to him, even if they are taught that their classmates are their brothers and that they are family.

Theseus notices how Dream's eyes are peeled to the sharp knives that glisten under the harsh light

of the large room. Theseus picks one up and tosses it between his fingers. They do not seem nervous at all, even if death looms in the air. Even if Theseus has seventeen other competitors before him, and they will fight for a future.

The others grab larger and heavier weapons. Staffs and batons, almost make Theseus seem weak.

They stand in line, with their backs straight and eyes forward. Their Instructor walks past them carefully, eyeing each student up and down and surveying their weapons. They scoff at bad posture and if a student cannot meet eye contact.

Theseus is one of the last to fight. He is matched with one other person, selected randomly.

Theseus is ruthless when he fights. He is matched with Twenty-One and knows that years ago, he would have hesitated before bringing death upon the other. He would have paused, and thought things through as if forcing himself into pity for his following actions. But he knows if Twenty-One does not die, then he will.

Twenty-One has selected a mace. He holds it unsure, as if thinking the deadly and stronger weapon he had chosen, the better chance he would have to live. But Theseus has knives, and he will not.

No one knows of his skills, other than Dream, Sapnap, and George. Theseus glances at them through the corner of their eye before their battle begins. Dream leans forward, while George is the opposite, leaning back while his eyes flicker around the room. Then there is Sapnap whose eyes focus on Theseus and do not stare away.

Theseus watches his opponent again. He throws his knife as soon as the Instructor shouts, "Go!"

Theseus does not miss when he aims. Twenty-One staggers backward immediately, many will ask themselves how he has lasted so long. He swings the mace at Theseus, but due to his injured arm, which has blood pouring, his stance is weak, and his aim is poor. Theseus ducks easily, and uses the grip against him, to fly him back.

He retrieves his knife and throws again. Theseus does not miss.

He almost hears Dream in his ear, "*Again,*" he would say. "*Until this is over.*"

George would state the opposite. *To think things through, to watch.*

And Sapnap, Sapnap would tell him to throw himself at Twenty-One until he does not breathe.

They will all tell him to survive.

Theseus does exactly that. Twenty-One throws his mace at him, and while Theseus spins to retrieve the poorly aimed weapon, his opposing student grabs the knife from the floor at throws it at him. He may throw it smugly, knowing Theseus' back is turned.

But Theseus is better than that. His arm bends back, and he grabs the blade before it can graze his bare skin. He does not hold back as he throws the knife at the boy, using the other's weapon; the mace, to finish him off. He is lucky if his heart still beats, he is unlucky if it does not.

There are no longer seventeen students with him. Some are dead, the others barely have a pulse, and are taken away.

Theseus remains strong.

They move into the residence. Tommy assumes at first, that Quackity will give them separate rooms in a complex. That he will finally get an area to himself, and it will be less likely he will see Dream and Sapnap every day. He would have gone with Dream, and Sapnap to the tour of the place with Quackity, but his shoulder had swollen, and fatigue had washed over him for the day they went.

It isn't what he's expecting though, because Quackity is not lying when he says they have a whole floor to themselves. It is one of the highest, and huge windows greet their vision when they step out of the elevator. They have their own code onto the floor to access it.

Tommy gapes at the size of the room, and his eyes marvel at the area. A huge living room greets them, with a large TV and white couches with comfortable cushions. He rushes to the windows that spread across the whole wall and presses his fingers against them to see the view of *Las Nevadas*. If Quackity wakes up to a similar sight, then Tommy understands why he doesn't quit his job, and live in retirement for the rest of his days. The area is beautiful.

Sapnap shows him their bedrooms. There are doors by the living room, six exactly. Two of them are bathrooms, the other is their bedrooms. Their rooms are finished, and their beds are soft. Tommy almost considers jumping on them, but he doesn't want the frame to break.

"What do you think?" Dream smiles as he carries the last of the boxes of their belongings inside. "Tommy?"

"Which room is mine?" He asks straight away. Dream chuckles and Sapnap rolls his eyes, to make fun of his question.

"The one in the middle," Dream says. "Between Sapnap and I."

"If you sneak out, we'll hear," Sapnap smirks. "So don't try anything."

Tommy scowls, but he doesn't say anything further on the topic, assisting Dream to unpack the boxes and bags. Maybe it's because he doesn't mind. They manage to get a lot done, unpacking blankets and clothes, and appliances and weapons to hide. Dream and Tommy may have left The Academy months ago, Sapnap quite a while afterward, but they will always keep a knife under their pillows.

Tommy sits on the kitchen counter, watching the view again. He sees big buildings and cars below. The sky has a life of its own, and they border between the ground and above.

"It is a nice view," Dream agrees as he unbandages Tommy's wound, which has become routine since he has had the stitches in. They will come out later today. "I'm surprised Quackity managed to find a place like this for us."

"He's dating Sapnap," Tommy says as it is obvious. "Knowing their relationship, it's obvious that Big Q will do anything for him."

“You’re right,” Dream hums and rebandages the stitches. He pats his leg. “Get off the counter.”

Tommy refuses. “Can you make something? I want to go training soon.”

“Tommy,” Dream sighs.

“What? You said I could,”

“You’re not fully healed yet,” Dream reminds him, before raising his eyes expectedly, waiting for him to jump off the counter. Tommy suspects it is because Dream doesn’t want to make a mess or break anything. Unluckily for him, Sapnap and Tommy will get into a few tackles and fights, and something will end up broken anyway.

Tommy leans on one of the seats, watching Dream maneuver around the kitchen. He notices his brother take out bread, butter, and spreads, so he guesses Dream is making sandwiches for lunch and is not wrong. “Wasn’t one of Philza’s requirements, that we could use their training grounds, and he could use ours?”

“Nothing is confirmed yet,” Dream takes out the slices of toast and places them on the wooden board. “Phil made that deal, likely knowing that all our agents had different training styles and needed to make sure everyone was at the same capabilities and such. He wouldn’t benefit using Quackity’s grounds as much.”

“Makes sense,” Tommy mumbles. “When’s the meeting?”

“Today.” Dream pauses. “I don’t think you should come.”

“Why not?” Tommy blurts loudly. “If it’s because of my fucking shoulder, I’m capable of—”

“I know you’re capable,” Dream stops his outburst, calmly. “I know you’re very capable, Tommy, and I know you can hold against your own. But it’s my fault, that I slipped you were Theseus – which Quackity now believes it isn’t such a good thing.”

“I’ll wear a mask,” Tommy tells him. “And I won’t speak, it will be like I’m not even there.”

Sapnap strolls into the room, his arms over his head as he stretches. “I’m not so sure about that,” he snorts, and Tommy pulls out to whack him in the arm. Sapnap dodges. “Even your face is loud. My ears hurt from looking at you.”

“Tommy,” Dream warns before Tommy leaps out of his seat and tackles Sapnap.

“Dream,” Tommy grumbles.

“I’m the favorite,” Sapnap boasts. “I’m the favorite brother.”

Dream can’t stop Tommy this time when he attacks Sapnap to the ground. Sapnap does not expect it either or falls to the ground with a yelp. Tommy struggles to pin his arms down and yells when Sapnap fights back.

“I don’t have a favorite,” Dream informs them when they finish. He finishes making the sandwiches and passes one to Tommy, who takes it from his hands quickly.

“I’m the favorite actually,” Tommy grins with food in his mouth. “He didn’t make you one,”

“George is the favorite,” Sapnap corrects him and then, realizes his mistake. They don’t speak about George, they never do. Even if Tommy desperately wants to; he wants Dream to open up and

he wants Sapnap to act like he feels something for once.

The room is tense and silent. Because of Sapnap's mention of George, and because he says, 'is' instead of 'was.'

"George would have liked the apartment," Tommy cuts the silence with his words. "He would have liked it so he and you could share a room, Dream."

Sapnap laughs lightly. "Yeah. He would have liked the view too."

They know because George has always liked the stars. He mentions it a few times to them, but Tommy knows he told Dream everything.

Dream laughs, but it doesn't sound as lighthearted as he intends his voice to be. "I think he would have stuck out every night to watch the view and taken one of us with him."

They are basketed in silence again, but it is not tense as before.

"We'll take The Academy down, for him," Sapnap says lowly. "We'll free the students, and the Teachers and Headmaster will get what they deserve." Sapnap will always blame himself for George's death, Tommy knows. But he will blame The Academy more.

Times like this, make Tommy wonder if he would have known Dream, Sapnap, and George if it weren't for The Academy. Even though he hates the place with every fiber in his body, there is a singular point, that because of it, he met his brothers. They may not be blood, or they may be, but they are *his*.

He knows they would have not met. That George would have been on the other side of the world, as the older boy would sometimes mention a memory of cold nights and other accents. Dream and Sapnap would be close in distance, but never close enough to meet. And Tommy? Tommy doesn't know because he doesn't like thinking of it. He hates knowing he was so unloved, that his parents gave him up, and that he was discarded so easily.

"Hey," Sapnap places a hand on his shoulder, snapping him out of his thoughts. Sapnap can change so fast, insulting him to then comfort. "You alright?"

"George isn't coming back, is he?" Tommy asks and Sapnap falters.

Dream speaks. "I don't want to give you false hope, Toms."

"Yeah," His brothers watch his reaction. "I just... George has always been strong."

"Yeah," Sapnap whispers. "He has."

George smiles.

He's never felt so alive before.

Sapnap meets a younger boy in his first year of being a Graduate. He is Twenty-Nine to everyone else, but Gray to him.

Gray is ruthless and fast and everything Sapnap admires. Gray is only twelve though.

Dream warns him, "Sapnap, you can't get close." Yet he gets close with Theseus. "Theseus is expected to be our fourth, Twenty-Nine is another assassin." Sapnap doesn't think so, Gray is more than a violent and furious boy everyone sees.

Sapnap sees himself in Gray. He sees an image of his past in the boy.

So, he talks to him. "I'll teach you everything you need to know," Sapnap offers, one day.

Gray responds cautiously as if this is a test, and he can never pick the right answer. "Okay."

Sapnap teaches him and watches the boy's performance during classes. He takes down his classmates and is fast on his feet. He has a fire behind his eyes and a spirit threatening to spill.

Gray will Graduate. Gray will survive.

But one day, Gray doesn't return.

"Twenty-Nine," Sapnap asks the Instructor. "What happened?" He explains how he has an eye on the student, how he sees potential.

"Started a fight after dinner," The Instructor explains with no other questions because Sapnap is a Graduate and is not questioned. "Stabbed another in the eye,"

They do not tell Sapnap the result of Gray, because he does not need them to tell him, for him to know.

He struggles to get out of bed, the next day. Dream finds him and sits by him. "George got attached too, once. He had just Graduated and saw potential in a kid. I didn't think you'd be the same though, and that you'd get so close."

"You're attached to Sixteen," Sapnap grumbles back.

"Theseus is different," Dream says. They play a game sometimes when they chose students who they believe will be their fourth. Sapnap stops one day, but he has always had an eye on Gray. Gray's purple eyes and his intelligence, and the anger that burned inside of him. Sapnap wants to let it loose, he wants to see how much destruction they can cause together, one day.

"You'll get over it," Dream promises and pats his shoulder. "Get up, we have a long day."

Sapnap gets up. Afterward, he refuses to be close with anyone but Dream and Sapnap. Because he can trust them to live longer. He trusted Gray once – he trusted that Gray could survive.

So Sapnap doesn't like Theseus. Because Theseus is like Gray, and he can't let himself become attached. He is weak if he does, he goes against the teachings that he once ignored.

"Do you not like him?" George asks after a long day of teaching. "Theseus, I mean. Because Dream does."

"Do you?" Sapnap grumbles curtly.

"I do," George replies honestly. "You should give him a chance."

"Why should I give him a chance?" Sapnap complains.

"He's sticking around," George says stiffly because George is always stiff and tense. "And he's like you in some ways. But you refuse to accept him."

"I don't need to accept him," *Connection is death*. "How do you know he will survive?"

"I trust Dream's instincts. And I've seen him, Sapnap. He can fight well and he's good with his knives."

Gray fights well and was one of the best in his class. He is good with knives as well, Sapnap teaches him everything he needs to know. His specialty is movement and running. He would have been a good addition to the missions, as Gray blends within the shadows and is stealthy.

"You're caught up with that other kid," George sighs. "But that doesn't mean you can't give him a chance."

For George and Dream to stop complaining, he does.

"When the kid doesn't return one day, don't come back to me complaining," Sapnap snaps. "One day, when you find out he's dead, you know I would have told you so."

Over the next couple of weeks, maybe months, Sapnap watches Theseus fight. He knows the kid is good, but when he finds himself reaching out, he pulls away again when he sees purple eyes set behind his blue.

"Sixteen!" Sapnap barks in lessons. "Again!" Or during running exercises, he ensures Theseus continues laps when he's finished. Even though he tells George his words of Theseus not making it out – and for him to say 'I told you so' – he makes sure Theseus will not take the care of the Graduates for granted. He will push Theseus until he knows he will survive.

"Why is Sapnap such a dick?" Sapnap overhears Theseus asking Dream one night.

"Theseus," Dream scowls. "You know you can't speak about him like that."

"I might as well, he can't make me run extra laps when he can't hear me," Theseus grumbles back.

"Look, I'll talk to him about that. Sapnap is just wary, that's all."

"Why?"

Dream sighs. "He believed in a kid, once. But he didn't make it." Sapnap turns his head over the corner, to see Theseus frown.

“I’ll make it,” Theseus then promises. “I’ll live.”

Sapnap swiftly swipes him a vanilla pudding on his plate, the next morning. It’s not an apology, because Sapnap is stubborn as well. And it’s definitely not because Dream had shouted at him in the early morning, for what he had been doing.

Theseus glances around quickly, Sapnap notices. How he eyes everyone in the room because an unexplainable sight of a second dessert has ended up on his plate. Sapnap recalls George speaking about Theseus’ addiction to sweets, once. He doesn’t know why he remembers.

Over time, Sapnap won’t admit he gets close. But he sees more of Gray in Theseus and sees more of Theseus in himself.

“I will survive,” Theseus says. “For you, and for myself.”

Sapnap believes him.

Quackity takes Tommy to the Syndicate’s facility.

He could have chosen Karl or even Sapnap. But he chooses Tommy. “I’ll need someone to guard me,” Is Quackity’s reasoning. “And now that Phil knows of you, it’s another thing I can use against him.”

Guards step aside for iron doors to open. Tommy’s mask is secured on tightly, and he tugs it below his chin for an extra measure. It was Dream’s precaution after hesitantly agreeing. At first, he was against it, until he realized that Tommy and Phil were going to reunite anyway, in given time.

He makes Tommy promise a couple of things, though. To never take his mask off, and to avoid speaking to anyone. Tommy can do that, even if Sapnap disagrees.

Quackity leads the way for Tommy, even if agents surround them, to ensure they do not pull any moves. “Tell me if one of them looks at wrong,” Quackity says in Spanish.

“I thought I was your bodyguard?”

Quackity smirks. “I can defend myself, kid. I thought you deserved to get out of *Las Nevadas* for a bit. And I want to see what you’re really capable of, with this type of equipment,” Their conversation continues in Spanish so that no one else can understand them.

“Capable?” Tommy gulps and remembers a time of capability, when he was pushed and shoved to his limits.

Quackity reassures him quickly. “I just want to see your skills, that’s all. Sapnap boasts about you all the time,”

Tommy nods his head and surveys the room. It is the main lobby, agents lounging in dark uniform.

They send curious glances to Tommy and Quackity as they pass.

“Phil made an agreement to not tell anyone of you,” Quackity explains. “They don’t know who you are.”

“I didn’t think they did,” Tommy mutters and recalls the reward above his head. “Otherwise, they’d be attacking me, the moment I stepped into the room.” Quackity laughs lightly and is led to a quieter hallway, where they meet an elevator.

Quackity instructs them, “We’ll take it from here. Thank you for leading the way.”

The agents who had guided them seem hesitant, but they know that if Quackity and Tommy did try a thing – that there are other agents with Philza by his office, to defend him in case of an emergency.

Quackity and Tommy step into the elevator. Quackity mockingly salutes and grins at the agents who stand outside, blinking. “What are your thoughts on the place so far?” He presses the top button and watches as the numbers blink between their view.

“Not better than yours,” Tommy says because Quackity’s agency is big and doesn’t need so many people lurking around to seem so competitive and threatening. “Although now that I think about it, maybe you do need a bit of remodeling.”

“What the fuck, Thomas?”

Tommy groans at the name and knows that it is Sapnap who has told Quackity that the name pisses him off and gets under his skin. He doesn’t correct him.

“You have ugly colored walls, Big Q. You should change it to red or some shit.” The elevator’s floor number slowly trickles upwards.

“I’m not changing my agency to vibrant red,” Quackity spits as if the thought will make him sick.

“Not a vibrant red, what about a dark maroon?” Tommy suggests. “So, if blood gets on the walls, you don’t have to clean it off.”

“You know what? I like how you think, kid.”

The elevator stops and the doors open. They walk through a long hallway and the doors are already open for them.

“Quackity,” Phil greets as Quackity sets foot in the room. Tommy lurks behind him, his mask secured, and his eyes analyzing Phil’s face. At the end of the Red Banquet, he did not get a good look at his face as his mask was on for most of the night. But now Tommy sees him clearly, and sees his thin blond hair and blue eyes and notices how something about him feels familiar.

“And Theseus,” Phil then says with long hesitance when he notices him present. “I didn’t expect you here,”

Tommy nods his head stiffly and Philza frowns. He turns to one of the present guards and informs him to bring Techno and Ranboo inside.

“It’s only fair,” Phil recons.

“I didn’t know you were collecting children,” Quackity scowls. “Ranboo? He’s a child.”

“I didn’t know you were, either.” Phil deadpans, and Quackity stills. “Theseus can’t be older than sixteen.”

Phil isn’t wrong but Quackity will not admit he is right. “Bring Techno and Ranboo in, and we’ll discuss what we want to discuss.”

“Couldn’t this wait?” Phil sighs, tiredly as they sit down. Theseus stays standing behind Quackity. If he sits down, he does not have a view of the door and cannot let any side of him be unprotected in such untrustworthy premises. “I’m arriving at *Las Nevadas*, later tonight, am I not?”

“That’s the thing, Phil,” Quackity sighs. “I don’t trust you on my grounds.”

Phil laughs until he doesn’t realize Quackity does not speak a joke. “Excuse me?”

“I don’t want your agents on my grounds. We have confidential matters, and I can’t trust them to use the facility accordingly.”

“Quackity,” Phil says slowly. “What part of this agreement do you not understand? For our alliance to be set, we must grant access to both areas. It’s common knowledge until our alliance is stopped afterward.”

“I can’t trust you,” Quackity grits his teeth. “I’d assume you would understand that, after your son’s actions.”

“You did provoke him, Quackity. Tell me that I’m wrong.”

Tommy follows their conversation, until this topic and he’s led by confusion. Phil talks about a feud between them until Tommy connects the dots and remembers Quackity speaking of an old friend hurting his eye. There is a long and large scar on his face, and Tommy concludes it is Technoblade who causes it.

“Philza?” Then Technoblade steps into the room, his eyes turning to stone at the sight of Quackity. “You did not inform me that he was coming,”

“Hello Technoblade,” Big Q smiles with sarcasm. “It’s good to see you.”

“If only I could say the same.” Techno’s eyes scan the room, and he finds Tommy hiding within the shadows. “Theseus.” He blurts out.

Tommy stares at him, emotionlessly.

Technoblade glares at Quackity, again. “Why did you bring him here? Does he not speak?”

“It’s almost as if you’re accusing me of something,” Quackity spits, and Tommy thinks that Techno must deliver with the idea that Quackity is the one responsible for his cold nature and unresponsiveness. That is his own doing, and partially Dream’s. “Theseus does not speak much.”

They both know how much of a lie that is.

Tommy likes to talk. The only reason he doesn’t sometimes is that he was taught for years that he must not speak and give many words away. Tommy speaks, but Theseus does not.

Techno frowns and his eyes do not leave Tommy’s. *This* Technoblade is so strange and different, Tommy thinks to himself. He almost forgets how Techno is before he meets him as Theseus. But Techno is reserved and carries an unimpressed expression on his face. This Techno – shows his

status through his eyes and stance. He is not afraid and will display it for all to see.

“If you two are done,” Phil stops them, and gestures for Techno to sit down on the chair next to him. He does but watches Tommy. “Quackity, as I was saying, I don’t think this alliance is working, here.”

“What?” Quackity grits.

“You’re lacking trust, and we both must understand each other’s perspectives for this collaboration to succeed. On top of that, I need the trust of all your agents – including your agency. Of course, I don’t particularly need your grounds to train on, but it should be accessible.”

“And that isn’t happening,”

“Then the agreement is off.”

Quackity blinks. Then again. “Philza, I know you need me. I have Theseus – and XD. You may not want me, but you need me.”

Phil furrows his eyebrows. “I think you’re overstepping, Quackity. You may be forgetting who I am.”

Tommy mutters to Quackity in Spanish, “Who is he?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Quackity says back. Phil watches their interaction carefully while Techno keeps staring.

“How about Technoblade takes Theseus to our training rooms?” Phil asks. “While we finish our discussion.”

“I don’t think there is anything we need to discuss here, Philza.” He says before adding, “And Theseus will not go anywhere with Technoblade.”

Phil raises his hand, wavering off any thought of his. “Theseus will be able to hold off himself if you’re worried about that. Technoblade can give him a tour. I’d prefer not to discuss any more business with him present.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “I’ll go,” he says in Spanish, to Quackity with short annoyance. “If he tries anything, he can share the scar you have.”

Quackity smirks. “Fine.”

Technoblade stands up quickly, the legs of the office chair dragging against the floor. While he walks out of the room, Tommy follows hesitantly behind him. He keeps his distance, and his fingers twitch towards his pocket, where his dagger lays.

“I won’t bite,” Techno says, turning around. They walk back through the hallway and he notices the distance between them. “I won’t hurt you.”

Tommy scoffs and turns away when they step into the elevator, he inches away.

“People will stare, because there aren’t many new faces around the training rooms – newer recruits don’t stay here. So, stick with me.” Techno pauses. “Although, you are wearing a mask, so there will be stares anyway.” Tommy wonders how their agency runs and if it is similar to The Academy. Although it does seem different at first – as they have many older agents and agents

have access to any room, he notices.

But Phil reminds him of his Headmaster, so that's a similarity.

Tommy watches Techno through the corner of his eye. Techno's sword is sharp, and so are his glances. He wears a simple black uniform, and his hair is loosely braided. He looks so different here, without his glasses and the usual attire Tommy sees him in.

The elevator doors open, and Technoblade strides out first. "I'll show you the training rooms, first."

Tommy nods his head.

"Usually, we practice here. Nothing intense, the sparring rooms are opposite. We have knives and swords – but no one uses them. We have guns in another compartment, but only selected members have the keys." Tommy nods his head again. "Do you want to try it out?"

Tommy's hands twitch and he can't glance away from the sharp weapons that scream his name, to be used.

"Okay,"

Technoblade leads him to the weapons. He takes the knives carefully and chooses them precisely. He prefers a steadier grip and a sharper blade. So does Sapnap.

"Whenever you're ready," Techno smirks and flicks a lever on the corner of the room.

Tommy tenses, until he realizes the lever he has flicked, moves the targets in front of him. They spin slowly and will be easy to aim at.

Tommy has always been cocky. A trait he learns from Dream, even though the older will deny the claim.

He stares at Techno while he makes his shots. They all land perfectly.

Techno conceals his impressed expression fast. "Well done."

Tommy does it again, with his eyes closed. He does it thereafter, with his back to the target and then with the speed faster. Technoblade pulls the lever down lower, for the targets to move faster and in different directions.

Tommy has hands of knives and does not miss. He is once Theseus and once a student of The Academy. They do not miss, they are perfect.

"Impressive," Technoblade nods his head. "I'll continue my tour, then." He hides an emotion; Tommy cannot see in time. "We have a library and gym. We also have sparring rooms, if you want to try. Ranboo is around here somewhere."

Tommy does not want to. Not that he's scared – he's definitely not scared off their amateur assassin who he can bend in half. "No," he denies.

"No, what?"

Tommy presses his lips shut.

"You have to speak up, Theseus," Technoblade says, coughing. His eyes meet his momentarily, but

then he looks away fast. Tommy could say his voice softens but he may be imagining it. "So I can hear you."

"It's okay," he says, clearer. "Show me the gym."

Technoblade does, leading him there. Tommy notices carefully each inch of the room, wondering if any information will be valuable to recite. But his memorization is well, and he can recall the layout of the room without a breath in between.

"The gym, pretty self-explanatory. All members have access here." Techno says. "You'll find me here."

"Why would I need to find you here?" Tommy grumbles.

Techno grins. "Phil is a persuader."

Tommy doesn't have enough time to figure out what he means.

They walk up a set of stairs next, to arrive at a library. Inside, right in front, a portrait sits in front of him. Philza stands, with his two sons.

Tommy notices Wilbur with his annoying smile and thin glasses. He almost mocks the photo, until he realizes that he is Theseus, and can't.

"That's Wilbur," Technoblade explains to him, quietly. "He's my brother."

A bitch, Tommy corrects him, in his mind.

They turn to leave, and a voice calls them back. "Technoblade!" And the man of the picture rushes to them with a scowl. "Ranboo told me that Philza had bought Quackity here, which I thought, wasn't the case, considering one of you would have told me."

"Wilbur," Techno greets, almost seeming bored with his brother.

Wilbur wears a familiar yellow sweater, and his hair is combed as it usually is. He stands apart from Techno, wearing a brown trench coat which is unusual in an agency where everyone wears uniforms and black outfits.

"Techno," Wilbur growls. "Do you refuse to tell me anything?"

"Wilbur," Tommy then says, and almost realizes his mistake.

Wilbur turns to him. He doesn't exactly turn, instead, his body jerks and his eyes widen like saucers. "Who are you?"

Tommy wonders if Wilbur recognizes him.

"No one—" Technoblade almost stops him, as if to deescalate a potential conversation or argument.

Tommy has two options in one split second. He can let Techno say nothing, and for Wilbur to figure out he is Tommy – because of course that is something Wilbur can recognize – or he can admit he is Theseus because it is clear that Wilbur does not know about him yet.

So he goes with the latter because Wilbur might as well know.

He does not realize the chaos he has unleashed, until afterward.

“Theseus,” he says. “I am Theseus.”

“Phil,” Quackity grits his teeth. “You cannot be serious.”

Phil smiles menacingly.

Quackity stands. “Philza.”

“The thing is, Quackity,” he says slowly, raising his hand to stare at his golden rings that match Quackity’s teeth. “Once they realize your true intentions, you know they will leave. I know for a fact, that you’re speaking false lies – that you will gain Theseus and XD’s trust to only rip them away later.”

“No.”

“You don’t care about those kids,” Phil spits and his blue eyes stab him. “You don’t give a *shit*.”

“I do–”

“You will use them, as they’ve been used for their lives. They deserve to be free, to have a choice. Not to be tied to another agency, with an owner who cares about control and improving his company.”

“You think you have an upper hand here, Phil.”

“It’s because I do,” Philza says. “Yet, all I ask for is one request from you.”

“It’s a request I can’t give.”

“You know that I always get my way,” Philza says. “Because I want Theseus here. He doesn’t have to join my agency – because I will not force him into a position he does not want, unlike you.” Quackity’s shoulders stiffen, and he is ready to protest because he would never make that kid do something, he doesn’t want to do. “However, I know about the reward over his head, and I want him here, to keep him safe. I can’t trust you to do so.”

“Phil.” Quackity glares.

“– Quackity,” Philza says back.

Quackity knows Philza well, they’ve known each other for years. Philza is known from many parts as the Angel of Death. A nickname that has come from his brutality and threatening nature. His ability to gain the trust of his students and takedown organizations and establishments for the exploitation of many sorts. But he’s known to give and show hospitality; he is a demon wearing angel wings.

“I want him here, Quackity,” Phil stands up. “Or I will show them all, who you really are.”

Chapter End Notes

longest chapter yet! took a while, and i love to read the comments. they're amazing and i read them over and over again.

another note, my online friend has made a spotify playlist for this book and they definitely do not have a gun to my head to say this
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7Cg2UdpZ13EefHhj70nk6S?si=b919faba363340ac>
<-- the link is here and some of the songs resonate the characters well!

i wanna say again that school has started so update times will be super irregular. could be a couple days to weeks. thank you so so much reading!

Faint

Chapter Summary

Tommy sees brown eyes and wonders how he feels. Maybe Wilbur does recognize him. “Hey.”

Tommy nods his head again.

“Do you...” Wilbur pauses. “Do you recognize me?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Quackity is not a good person.

He rests on a balcony of an abandoned building, wondering when it is his turn to die. His wrists are bruised with black and blue, and he struggles to keep his eyes open. He does not have to look at himself, because he can feel the burns, scars, and wounds that cover his body. His face likely seems like a child mistook his face for a coloring book – it isn’t a pretty sight.

The moon watches him. He asks it for advice.

“What do I do?” His voice cracks, and he almost chokes on air.

The moon does not respond.

“What do I do?” He repeats and is met by silence.

Quackity drops his head on the concrete of the floor under him. He sees light. Maybe he’s finally gone. But it isn’t his time to die, not yet. He is alive and breathing, and he is surviving.

His chest rises and falls, and his palms face the smooth surface under him. The coolness is unusual to his hot skin, and he presses harder, letting the texture soothe his skin. He turns his body, grunting until his stomach lays on the cement, and he rests his forehead into his arms.

The scar on his skin hurts. The one from the blade, from the Blade. He bleeds onto his palms but does not give enough fucks to care. The scar will heal but will mark. At least it is his left eye, he prefers his right better.

“Quackity,” Phil’s voice echoes his ears. “We trust you like you are one of us. Do not use take it for granted.”

But he does.

“Quackity,” Techno then says. “If you do – then you’ll know what’s coming, I hope.”

He does, and now he faces the consequences of his actions. He laughs and the moon smiles brighter.

“You know,” Quackity tells the moon. “I knew Philza never trusted me. Keep your friends close,

but your enemies closer, really.” He sighs, longingly. “But it’s okay.”

Quackity stands. “I think I’m going crazy. Karl would call me crazy. Then he’d laugh.” He stretches his limbs and flinches at the pain that stretches his body. “But I’ll be crazy if I have to. Philza won’t know what will hit him.”

He is Quackity and he is not a good person.

At least he is self-aware – at least he knows. Philza doesn’t know that, nor does Techno. They do not realize the bad people they are, while Quackity accepts it. He is okay knowing that he is murderer, a betrayer, and a *traitor*. He is perfectly fine with it.

Quackity licks his lips and thanks the moon. He leaves the building and flickers a flame to his cigarette. His lips are chapped and his mouth tastes of blood.

Or perhaps, it is the bitter taste of vengeance.

Phil’s daring eyes force him to look away.

“You know Theseus is my son,” Phil says slowly. “You remember.”

(Nights ago, years away, Phil admits to Quackity that he has a missing son. He says his name is Theseus.)

“You knew,” Phil furthers. “And you did not say a thing.”

Quackity remembers the feeling of cold cement and hot skin.

“You came here to flaunt,” Phil spits. “You came to flaunt that you have him, that I don’t – and that he doesn’t remember anything about his past. You are sick, Quackity.”

“I didn’t remember.”

“Bullshit.”

Quackity meets his blue eyes, which remind him of Tommy. Like father, like son after all. “So, what if I know? He’s not yours anymore.”

“He’s my son,” Phil glares.

Quackity smirks and stands up stronger. “The thing is, Phil, he isn’t really. He doesn’t know you; he doesn’t love you. Theseus finds it hard to trust people, listen to me when I say that he won’t follow a word out of your mouth.” Quackity pauses, with a sick smile. “He has his own family now, and you’re not a part of it.”

“Quackity,”

“Phil,” Quackity cocks his head. “His name isn’t Theseus anymore, did you know? He goes by something else. There is another boy under that mask. He won’t let you take it off.”

“I won’t do anything he won’t want.”

“And he won’t want to stay with you,” Quackity thinks of Dream and Sapnap. They are his brothers, and he has seen them together, to know that they would give up their lives for each other. Philza is an outside force and won’t reach them. Tommy will push him away; push the people with who he can’t trust or refuses to hold care or connection.

Quackity knows Tommy cannot even trust himself, fully. So he will not trust Phil, for a long, long, time.

“The thing is Quackity,” Now Phil steps forward as if to intimidate him. “Theseus doesn’t know how much of a danger he’s in. He’ll stay here. And you know exactly what will happen if he doesn’t.”

“I’d like to see you try anything.”

“Oh, trust me,” Phil smirks. “I will.”

Techno shoves Wilbur away before he can speak anything to the boy – because he can mention that Theseus is their brother and for their whole plan to fall.

“Technoblade,” Wilbur hisses, struggling against his grip. “You better be fucking kidding me. That isn’t my fucking brother out there–”

“It is,” Techno interrupts and shoves a door behind them, throwing Wilbur to the side, because Techno has always been stronger. “That is Theseus, and he’s... changed.”

“Technoblade,” Wilbur doesn’t use his full name regularly. “I’ll give you five seconds to explain.”

“Is that a threat?” Techno smirks but explains anyway. “Phil and I haven’t known for long.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me?!” Wilbur shouts. “That is Theseus there. Theseus – do you hear yourself? Our brother. Our *brother*.”

“He doesn’t recognize us, he doesn’t remember,” Techno coughs into his fist. “I’m going to shorten this down because I don’t have enough time for you to shout at me because the kid is out there alone. But he’s from The Academy.”

“*The Academy*?–”

“His memory was wiped, and he’s an assassin now.”

“*Assassin*–”

“And he works for Quackity.”

“*Quack*–”

Wilbur looks like he might just faint.

“Phil and I don’t know much now. For whatever reason, you couldn’t know. And the kid can’t know we’re related – not yet.”

“Techno,” Wilbur shakes his head. “You’re saying that I can’t hug my brother, who I haven’t seen in years? Who I thought was dead – ?”

“I’m saying exactly that. Unless you want him to stab you, he’s trained and an experienced fighter. He can take you down in a second.”

“And you?” He expects Techno to say he won’t be able to.

But Techno says the opposite. “One minute. Give or take spare a few seconds.”

Wilbur slumps to the floor. He rests his head back on the grey walls and stares at the tiled ceiling. Techno watches the empty hallway, glances at Theseus through the small window of the door, and sits by his younger brother.

“You don’t tell me shit. I would have liked to know,” Wilbur says emptily.

“Blame Phil,” Techno says. “I told you.”

“An assassin – The Academy,” Wilbur is in shock, his eyes glassy and his mind likely unable to grasp the sudden revelation. “What’s going to happen? Is he going to stay? He doesn’t even recognize us – he doesn’t know who we are.”

“He’s with Quackity, but Phil’s figuring something out,” Techno promises. “Theseus will be home, soon enough.”

“Why does he wear that mask?”

“He wore it at The Red Banquet too. I’m not so sure why he still is.”

“What do I say to him?” Wilbur croaks.

“Introduce yourself. And apologize for your outburst.”

Wilbur nods his head, and the brothers stand up. They push the doors open and head towards the boy.

But he is not standing by them anymore. Theseus is gone.

“Well,” Techno scratches his forehead, awkwardly.

“Fuck.”

Tommy leaves Techno and Wilbur, to find Quackity again. As much as he appreciates the whole tour and Techno's company – he would prefer to get the fuck out here. He's broken all of Dream's rules, and although he would usually be overjoyed by the fact, the hallways and empty rooms make him feel weird. The hairs on his back stand and he is cautious.

They are taught to trust their gut, and Tommy does. He finds the elevator and goes to Quackity. Phil's office, he remembers is where he is meant to go. His training comes in hand here, as he can maneuver the exits and entrances, and get to the elevator in one piece. He takes the stairs though, not wanting to be in an awkward position with any other person, in a tight space.

(He recalls a test they take, where they are shoved into one room and deprived of food and water for days. He remembers the feeling of sweat and sticky bodies. The caving walls and lack of light make him shiver.)

He arrives at Phil's office and strides through the door.

He blinks.

Phil stands close to Quackity, towering over him, while Quackity glares back, his stance defensive and prepared to attack back. But Tommy is here for a reason, and that reason is to be his bodyguard. He swoops in, like the assassin he is trained to be, and grips onto Phil's arms before he can step another foot forward.

"Don't touch him," Tommy says plainly and forces Phil's arm away. He ignores Quackity's smug expression and laughter in his eyes, as he stands behind him.

To Big Q, he tells him in Spanish so Phil does not understand, "Can we leave? I don't want to stay here, anymore."

Quackity ignores him. "I told you, Phil." Likely referencing a previous conversation.

"Theseus," Phil now ignores him. "Do you enjoy working for Quackity?"

"I don't work for him," Tommy does not work for anyone after he has left The Academy. He works for himself, and only himself.

"You don't?" Phil asks incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"I think you would be sure of that, Philza," Quackity spits. "Theseus and I will be leaving now."

"Phil!" The door shoves open again, and Techno rushes into the room. "Theseus is gone—" And the words die on his lips when he sees him. "Oh." He sighs.

"Technoblade, we were just going," Quackity steps back, and raises an arm around Tommy. Tommy notices how Phil and Techno both tense. Tommy does not like Quackity's arm around him but allows it for now.

"No," Phil refuses. "You weren't."

"The deal is off," Quackity explains. "I don't need your alliance."

Techno furrows his eyebrows and looks at Phil. "What?"

“We’ll keep Theseus safe, that’s all I ask,”

And Tommy snaps into the conversation, from his silent position. He will not be hot-headed and shout, and instead, his words are deadly and silent.

“What did you say?”

“The Academy is after you,” Phil says with softness. “I’m offering you a place to stay, as I believe Las Nevadas isn’t.”

Tommy glares at Phil. He almost smiles when he cowers. “I don’t need protecting. I’m trained, myself.”

“And he has a family, Phil,” Quackity flaunts. “A family.”

“Theseus,” Techno then says. “We want to help you as much as possible. Phil is experienced with this and will help with your mission. But it will be better for you to stay here, so The Academy won’t find Quackity’s location – and target them.”

“And they won’t target you?” Quackity scoffs. “They won’t find out he’s here, and go for you instead?”

“When was the last time you updated your safety protocol? Or updated your security – or even looked at the protection measures placed on your ground?” Quackity’s lips seal shut. “This is what I’m saying.”

“They’re going to increase the reward above Theseus’ head. They will increase it to one million, maybe more. To ensure the mission is not jeopardized, he needs to be in safe hands.”

“I am in safe hands,” But no one listens.

Wilbur Soot makes his entrance as a debate continues. Tommy is left to stare at him, as he paces into the room, silently. But his presence is drowned by the shouts and words of the room, and Tommy can’t look away from him.

He hates to admit that he misses him. He misses their talks, and conversations, and fights. He misses Wilbur’s comfort and knowing he was one phone call away from anything. Wilbur was weird and showed up at the weirdest times, but he was different to Tommy. Because Tommy has had Dream and Sapnap and George, but they care because they have to. They care because they are his brothers and want him to survive. Wilbur does not have to.

Although Tommy will never admit it aloud; he misses the somewhat of normality he once had for a short time. When all he thought of was his shifts at Niki’s bakery, and whether or not Wilbur was going to arrive and annoy him until closing time.

As Tommy watches Wil, Wil watches him too. There isn’t much to see, because of the mask that covers his features and expression. It allows him to stand neutral and unbothered, even though his eyebrows are tilted downwards, and he frowns. He can conceal his emotion, but Wilbur’s is out to see.

Wilbur seems surprised and shocked. Wilbur has an expression on his face that Tommy has never seen before.

“Theseus,” Wilbur says calmly. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Tommy nods his head at him, stiffly. Wilbur frowns, and steps around Technoblade to him. He walks up to him and the room silences.

Tommy sees brown eyes and wonders how he feels. Maybe Wilbur does recognize him. “Hey.”

Tommy nods his head again.

“Do you...” Wilbur pauses. “Do you recognize me?”

And Tommy’s mouth goes dry because he does not know how to respond to that. Wilbur knows, his mind rings. *Wilbur knows. Wilbur knows.*

Wilbur asks to be recognized while Tommy does not. He is confused, momentarily. “No,” he eventually says, because that is all he can.

“Wilbur,” Quackity growls and tugs Tommy away. Tommy has not realized that the room has stopped for them to speak, and thought it was just his mind. “Step behind.”

“I thought he – I thought he was going to...”

“Wilbur,” Phil mutters. “It’s okay.”

“What are they talking about?” Tommy asks Quackity. “Tell me, or I will stab you.”

Quackity smirks. “Okay, okay.”

“What did he say?” Wilbur asks as Phil mutters, “And I need to learn Spanish.”

“Theseus,” Techno introduces. “What do you want to do?”

Tommy does not know.

“You don’t want to put the mission in jeopardy, do you? Staying at Las Nevadas could potentially put his company in harm. It could put your family in harm.”

Tommy recalls Dream telling him to survive, one day, and to himself before anyone else.

But Dream is his brother, and so is Sapnap. He puts them before anyone else. Because they save him. He survives, because of them.

“Look, kid,” Techno strolls over. “You’re sixteen? Seventeen? I don’t know–” Something about him says that he does. “Phil has been working on his case for months, we all have. We can’t let anything get in the way of reaching our own goal.”

Tommy isn’t as affected by Techno’s words as he thinks he is. The man is attempting to control his view, and sway him into agreeance. But Tommy’s learned past that. What he is concerned about, is his brothers.

He does not agree for Technoblade. He does not agree for Philza, or for the reward on his head.

He agrees for his brothers.

“Okay,” Tommy agrees.

Wilbur sings a song for his younger brother.

He is asleep before he finishes.

Wilbur watches his sleeping expression and stands slowly. His heart burns when he sees him because Theseus looks so much like their mother, and their mother is dead. They share the same brown hair, but Theseus has the eyes of their father.

Wilbur has the voice of his mother and finishes with his voice yearning for more. The song was never his, and now it will be.

He flickers off the light and leaves the room.

He does not know that that will be one of the last times he will sing to him.

Dream is furious, although furious, may not be the proper word to use in the situation.

He grabs Quackity's shirt and pushes him to the wall. He swears his stomach and punches his eye until Sapnap pulls him away with his strength. Sapnap is angry too, Tommy sees the fire in his eyes.

Quackity staggers and almost loses his balance when Dream is pulled away from him. He clutches his face and rubs his stomach.

"Quackity!" Dream shouts. "Tell me this is a joke, or so help me—"

"I agreed to it," Tommy says plainly. "It's my fault."

"Shut up, Tommy!" Dream shouts as Sapnap says, "No it isn't," And Tommy decides to keep his mouth closed after that.

"I trusted you," Dream points his pointed finger in his direction. "No, that's too far – I believed you were decent enough, to protect my younger brother. You're full of fucking shit, Quackity."

"Dream," Sapnap mutters. "That's enough."

"You're defending him!" Dream laughs, disbelievingly, and snaps in Russian, "You love him, but you can't trust him."

Tommy ponders on the thought – because love means trust, he assumes. But he's not the best with emotions and naming what he is feeling, so he leaves the thought.

"Dream," Sapnap snaps back. "Let him speak and explain yourself. Or leave the room."

Dream glares. But he is silent.

"I'll give you three minutes to explain yourself. Start."

Quackity coughs into his fist. His hair is a mess, and his shirt is crumpled. "Phil..."

"Quackity," Dream snaps, and Sapnap shoves him again, to lay off. Tommy wonders if he should leave the room, or say something, but the glance Dream sends him immediately after, forces him to stay put.

"Phil believes Tommy will be a danger to the mission if he's left here. He believes that his grounds are safer, to ensure that The Academy won't come after him, and jeopardize our plan."

"And you agreed?"

"I did," Tommy interrupts. "I don't want to ruin the plan." I don't want to see you hurt, he wants to say. I don't want to be the reason for your harm.

"Philza is persistent. As much as I don't want to believe it – we need him. And if we do, he has to comply with his request."

"Well, he's not going," Sapnap laughs like the situation is a joke. He walks up to the boy, and slings a shoulder around him – he can as his shoulder is healed now, or at least, better than before. "Right?"

"Sapnap," Tommy says quietly. "I have to—"

"No," Dream says strictly. "You won't."

Ever since Tommy has left The Academy, he refuses to allow anyone to control him as they did. But Dream is an exception because Dream is his brother.

"Then what are we going to do?" Quackity asks. "We can't do this on our own."

"We'll leave," Dream comes to the feared conclusion. "We'll run."

"No, we won't," Sapnap's arm drops. "You aren't serious."

"What if I am?"

"Leave the room," Sapnap deadpans. "Leave the fucking room, until you make some goddamn sense, Dream. You're taught better than this," he says his last words with a thick accent. "We won't run because that isn't the answer. They'll find us easily because even though we're trained, we will become sloppier and leave a trail. It is the last option we'll take – the very last, so leave the room and come back when you'll think with a straight mind."

Dream is the oldest and is honored. He is Graduate One and The Academy's best assassin. They look up to him because he is the greatest, the best. And although Sapnap may be younger, and weaker in some areas, he controls Dream and tells him what to do. His voice drips with urgency and fierceness, and his fists curl with his shouts.

Dream leaves, then. Silence resumes.

“We will think rationally and logically,” Sapnap growls. “None of the running away bullshit – we aren’t risking our lives any more than we have to.” He collapses on the seat by Tommy, and they lean back on the warm cushion of the couch.

Quackity does not know what to say. Neither does Tommy, nor Sapnap.

Sapnap’s eyes land on Punz on the corner of the room. He stares forward and never speaks unless spoken to.

So, he asks, “What do you think, Punz?”

“Excuse me?”

“What do you think we should do?” Punz may not show it, but he listens to their every word and holds all secrets.

“And you want my honest opinion?”

“Sit down,” Sapnap offers. “Tell us.”

Punz sends a wary look to Quackity, who relents with a nod. Punz carefully walks over to their circle and stands by them.

“Well?” Quackity asks.

“This is regarding, Tommy, correct?” Punz asks. “You don’t want him to go to Phil, but you want to continue the mission?”

“Yeah,” Sapnap nods.

“Well,” Punz pauses. “If my younger brother were in the following position, I would likely give him to Phil. I understand that he may be dangerous, so I would, of course, establish conditions. But Phil likely wants The Academy to be taken down – and as soon as possible, and he won’t be able to with the threatening deal that their months of plans could be reduced if he was found. An extra bonus allows an entrance into a better facility for training – so that’s a consideration.”

“You have a brother?” Quackity takes from Punz’s explanation. “What’s his name?”

Punz does not seem like he wants to respond, but Quackity is his boss, so he does. “His name is Purpled.”

“Quackity,” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “On topic.”

“I’ll stay with Philza,” Tommy interrupts before Quackity can say anything. “I don’t want to put anyone in danger. It won’t be for long until The Academy is gone forever.”

Sapnap is reluctant and Dream returns to the room. “Well?” Sapnap questions.

“I apologize for punching you, Quackity,” Dream says stiffly. “But I won’t apologize for anything else, because that’s all on you.”

“Understandable,” Quackity shrugs his shoulders. “You’re lucky your Sapnap’s brother, Dream. I won’t be as lenient if you weren’t.”

“Well, you’re lucky you’re his boyfriend,” Dream snaps back. “You’re not a fucking threat.”

“The Academy is,” Sapnap says. “And we have to make a decision.”

Dream and Quackity start talking over each other and Sapnap stands up to stop the madness.

But Tommy sighs when they’ve finished. “What’s there to discuss? I’m going.”

Dream comes to a realization that night.

He is awake because he does not sleep. He lays on his bed, and his back arches upwards as his mind remembers years ago. He calls papers he searched, and a name pressed by the top of the page.

Theseus, they write his brother’s name. Then they write his father’s, Phil.

Dream does not realize sooner because Phil is such a common name, and he glosses over any other facts. He had a Phil in his class, it isn’t anything unusual to name your son.

But then pieces fit together, and everything makes sense.

Phil wants Tommy – because Theseus is his son. He wants him *back*.

Dream almost kicks himself, for not realizing sooner. They have the same eyes.

He goes to Tommy’s room, after sitting with himself. It is late at night, so no one is awake. Except for him of course, but that is expected.

Tommy stirs and sleepwalks lightly. Dream doesn’t concentrate on his words, but rather his voice. He lays on top of the covers and pulls his hand through his brother’s blond curls.

He has a family, Dream thinks. *That is not Sapnap, and I.*

Dream has always been suspicious of their past. They are told that they are abandoned and taken to The Academy because their parents hate or do not want them anymore. But over the years, Dream remembers love and a family. He remembers a feeling of care, and warm hands, and wonders if he has been lied to all his life.

“Tommy,” he says lowly and wishes the boy will wake up. But Tommy stirs and moves his head to the side, and Dream decides to let him sleep. “You’re my brother,” Dream says to him. “And I–”

He does not continue, because he can’t.

Dream wonders if Phil will love him and if Phil will care. But if Philza had wanted Tommy to know, that he was his father, he would have stated the following by now. A selfish part of him wishes, he never messed up, because Tommy would still be his and Philza would not know.

But Tommy deserves a family, and he deserves love. And if Philza will give it, then Tommy deserves it more than anything.

There are many words Dream wants to say, but he can't. He wants to say that there was a reason he chose Tommy and a reason why he can't confess these words. Dream has always struggled with his emotion and showing people things he did not want to share.

"Dream?" Tommy stirs into slight consciousness.

"Shh," Dream pushes his hair. "Go to sleep?"

"Why're you awake?" he mumbles with a long yawn.

"Couldn't sleep," Dream whispers. "I'll go if you want."

"No, stay," Tommy mumbles, and his eyes flutter closed once again.

Dream sighs and leans on the headboard of the bed. He will tell Sapnap later. After, he may tell Tommy.

Until then, he watches stars outside the window and exhales.

"Bye Punz," Slime waves. "From *Las Nevadas*."

Slimecicle has always confused Tommy.

("I'm an agent," he explains. "I may not be the best, but I have a couple of tricks up my sleeve, that others do not.")

Tommy wouldn't call the guy weird – but he's definitely strange. Slime does a thing where he greets people with their first names or full names. Then he says, "from the office," or, "from the night bar," or from someplace else.

"Why do you do that?" Tommy asks, with an eyebrow raised. "Why do you do that thing?"

Slime does not understand at first, but soon he does. "To remember," he says. "I'm better with my sight, and touch, and smell, but not so my memory."

"Why not me?" Tommy then desires the question because it's been on his mind for some time. Everyone else has their own '*froms*' but Tommy does not.

"Because I don't know where you're from, Tommy," Slime laughs like it's obvious. "You weren't born in The Academy, and you're not from *Las Nevadas* because you don't work for Quackity."

"And Dream? Or Sapnap?"

Slime shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know about them either. Can you tell me?"

But Tommy does not know, because they aren't born in The Academy, nor do they belong to Quackity's company. They do not have a home of their own, nor do they have their apartment anymore.

Tommy cannot answer Slime's question because he does not know himself.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! thank you so so much for reading <3

the comments are so nice to read!! and next chapter will be very fun to write so see you then ;)

(edited this on my phone might come back later to fix other mistakes)

Crumble

Chapter Summary

“We’ll escape,” One day, Dream promises. “You, me. George, Sapnap.”

But now, it is just him and Dream.

“It’s just you and me,” Dream voices his thoughts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Theseus is content. His friendship with Sapnap grows strong, as they have finally put aside their differences. Sapnap owns up to his past mistakes, and now he provides advice and jokes along with the younger boy. George is the same as ever, he smiles when he wants to, and when he doesn’t, he remains analyzing and careful.

Theseus feels *something*. They do not feel because they are assassins, but something indescribable stirs in Theseus’ stomach and he cannot explain it. At first, he thinks that it is fear, but fear has never felt this good. It has never made him want to wake up every morning, and sleep calmly at night.

Theseus knows that their friendships change, but so do their physical appearances. Sapnap’s hair grows even longer, and he gets taller. Not taller than George, whose eyes now seem darker and his face is slimmer. He grows a small beard but must shave it. Sapnap teases him about it all week.

“My relationship with Dream—” George stops himself quickly, one realizing his mistake. His next words are slow and careful. “I mean friendship.”

Sapnap and Theseus burst out laughing and it is that summer evening, that they find out there is more going on between the two. Theseus had always suspected it, but he never furthers on the topic.

Dream is different too. He returns from one long mission in the winter of someplace else, with a clearer face and new sight in his eyes. They decide that something happens on the mission because Dream comes back slightly different. He is still strict and bold, but something has changed.

“I just had a lot of time to think about things,” Dream explains, watching Theseus’ blue eyes. “I had a lot of time to myself.”

They mark this time, as a change in all their lives. Time moves forward, which is hard to remember between the stoned walls.

Theseus grows an inch. He ages a year and survives. George buys Sapnap another bandana, but he keeps his old one. Dream goes through three different hairstyles, one where he slicks his back, another where he pulls his hair to the side, and lastly when he cuts it short to leave a part in the middle.

Theseus improves his knife skills. George begins teaching Mandarin and Sapnap beats Dream’s

personal best on the obstacle course. Time moves forward; time does not stop for them.

“Theseus,” Sapnap mutters and pushes the younger one against the corner wall. He takes out a knife, and Theseus stands still. He holds his breath.

“Don’t go on your toes,” Dream frowns, pushing Theseus’ shoulder down. They measure his height; they have for months. Sapnap shoves the knife into the wall and carves out a line. Theseus stands back, and Dream points to the distance between the last line, and the new dent.

“You’ve grown,” Dream says proudly. “You’ll be taller than Sapnap soon.”

They grow up between the walls. They do not celebrate birthdays, but many birthdays pass. Agents come, many leave and do not return. The assassins learn to adapt and change and prepare. Their lives are constant cycles, but they are satisfied with that because it is all they know.

And Theseus is content. He meets Dream every morning, and George will always slide him his pudding. Sapnap will glare at him during classes, and mess around with him afterward.

Theseus could not ask for anything else.

Until everything goes wrong.

That night, Tommy dreams for the first time in a long time. He dreams of George.

“*Hey Tommy,*” George says soft.

“Tommy?” Tommy repeats his name. “*I’m Theseus to you.*” George will never meet Tommy – he will ever only know of a Theseus.

George shrugs his shoulders. “*Keep going, Tommy. I believe you.*”

“*I am going.*”

“*You’re tired,*” George says as if he needs a reminder. “*You’re not the same person, as you once were. You’re exhausted – you don’t care anymore.*”

“*I do care,*” Tommy says in his dream.

“Not as much as you used to. I see it in your eyes, you’re okay with dying. But keep going, it will be okay soon.”

But then George disappears, and Tommy wakes up.

He rubs his head as he enters the dining room. Dream and Sapnap are already there, whispering lowly among each other as Tommy comes beside them, to slump on the countertop chairs. He pulls his head into his arms and closes his eyes.

“Earth to Tommy?” Sapnap chuckles after a breath. “You good, kid?”

Tommy mumbles something under his breath, but he does not know himself because he isn’t concentrating on his voice.

“Do you want breakfast?” Sapnap then questions. “Dream’s making pancakes, right?”

Dream does not speak, and Tommy slowly raises his head. Dream’s eyes pierce into him, and his emotionless face says a story, as George would have once said. He has a storm behind his vibrant eyes, and feelings threaten to spill and escape. He holds it back and remains a tough exterior.

“Dream?” Sapnap repeats and pulls his palms in front of his eyes, moving them up and down until Dream blinks. “You’re a statue.”

“Hm?” Dream glances away at the stove, his back hunched. Tommy stares at him weirdly. “Nothing, it’s uh – nothing.”

“Well,” Sapnap coughs awkwardly. “Quackity’s meeting up with us this afternoon. You’ll be at Phil’s this afternoon.”

“For how long?” Tommy questions quietly.

“Until the mission begins,” Sapnap sighs. “I don’t know how long that will be, though.”

Tommy frowns, and his eyes move over to Dream, who is still and doesn’t say anything. In the mornings, Dream is talkative, so this is a bit different from usual. He checks Tommy’s shoulder and debriefs him of the content of the upcoming hours, whether that would be heading to the gym or his office. But Dream doesn’t speak now, and Tommy desperately thinks of something to fill the void.

“I dreamt about George,” And Tommy regrets it afterward.

“Really?” Sapnap raises an eyebrow. “What happened?”

Tommy doesn’t say anything and looks away. “Just, you know. He said something he’d say.”

“Do you dream often?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. “It depends what you count as one.”

Sapnap leans on the counter and tilts his head, with question. “What do you mean?”

“Sometimes... sometimes I dream of the past. Memories of death, and killing,” Tommy shudders. “And the faces of... the people that I killed.”

“What?” Sapnap mutters in disbelief and turns to Dream. “Did you know?”

“Know what?”

Sapnap groans. “That the kid was dreaming of this shit?”

Dream blinks. “Uh, yeah.”

Dream does know. Tommy tells him a while ago.

“Thanks for telling me,” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “Have you tried taking medication, Tommy? You shouldn’t have to deal with that shit.”

Tommy snorts. “Don’t you remember the last time I was on anything? I almost died.”

“Don’t joke about that,” But Tommy doesn’t joke. “Well, if Dream’s going to a pissy bitch this morning, let’s go get breakfast. The café around here isn’t too bad, but I’m feeling sweet.”

“Wait,” Dream pauses before Tommy leaves the room with Sapnap. “Sapnap,”

The boy rolls his eyes. “Fine. I’m waiting outside.”

Tommy and Dream are left alone. Tommy stares blankly at the older, while Dream appears anxious to avoid the topic he will soon have with the younger.

“Tommy,” Dream says quietly. “I need to tell you something.”

“What is it?”

Dream watches him. In a last-minute decision, he says something else. “Be safe.”

“Oh-kay?” Tommy edges towards the door. “Is this it? I’m really hungry and—”

Dream walks up to him, then, and hugs him.

Tommy pauses. “Dream?”

“I want you to be safe,” He says quietly. “And if anyone hurts you, I’ll kill them.”

Tommy chuckles nervously. “Wha-at?”

Dream removes his arms and watches his blue eyes. Tommy recognizes the gesture; when Dream analyzes his eyes, an action he did in the past. When he wanted Tommy to listen really well and really understand his following words.

Tommy listens now, and he understands. “I want you to be okay more than anything,” Dream admits. “When this is over, we’ll do anything you want to do.”

“Huh?” The words die on the tip of Tommy’s tongue.

“If you want to stay here, or if you want to leave. I’ll follow you.”

Tommy nods his head uncertainly. “Okay.”

But Dream isn’t finished. “I don’t trust Philza, I don’t expect you to either. Just know that this isn’t voluntary, I’d fight Quackity on this, if I could. But I can’t.” Dream has never sounded so powerless before – it’s strange. Because he is usually the one in control, the one who knows what he is doing and dictates the plan. But now, everything is out of his grasp, and he can’t control what

will happen.

Because Tommy is going to the Syndicate, and he will be staying within the protection of their agency. Anything can happen.

“It’s been just us for a little long, hasn’t it?” Dream queries “We made a promise to escape – to survive.”

Tommy would never forget. Not even if he wanted to.

“Escape. Survive. Live.”

Tommy can almost hear Dream’s haunting words of the past. He can almost feel the pressure against his skin and the intensity of his eyes.

“Yeah.”

“I’d come with you to breakfast, but I have a meeting with Quackity,” Dream tells him. “If I don’t see you before you leave, I just wanted you to know.”

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “I won’t see you later?” He doesn’t want to sound desperate; he doesn’t want to sound like anything because Dream is strong, and he wants to show his older brother that he is strong too.

“I can’t,” Dream doesn’t elaborate further. “Have fun with Sapnap.”

“Okay,” Tommy turns around, and is about to stalk out the door, but Dream grabs his shoulders again and pushes him back. “Dream,” Tommy complains.

“I’ll see you,” Dream promises. “And I’ll kill them if they look at you wrong.” His arms feel heavy and loving. Tommy hasn’t felt love before, he does not know it feels because he’s never had a family. Sapnap is loved because he has Quackity and Karl. Dream had George, once. Tommy doesn’t know how to love or feel love.

He can’t love, he is once taught. He is a monster.

But the arms around him, and the words whispered in his ear, and the feeling that erupts in his stomach, feels so close to the emotion he can’t feel. And Tommy doesn’t know whether to accept it or not.

Sapnap drags him away, not long later. He shouts a couple of words at Dream before he slams the door closed and they enter the elevator.

“He’s pissed,” Sapnap says as they wait to arrive on the ground floor. Sapnap taps his foot on the metal impatiently and Tommy stares at the descending numbers, blankly. “He won’t show it, but he doesn’t want you to go. He hates that you have to, which is why he can’t be there when you have to leave.”

“I gathered,” Tommy notes.

“I don’t think you do,” Sapnap replies, with a small smile. “Dream cares about you, Tommy. We all do.”

Tommy does not respond and stares away. They reach the ground floor, and Sapnap leads him outside. They go to a nearby breakfast diner, and order pancakes, since they both have a sweet

tooth.

Sapnap passes his packet of maple syrup, just like the days back at The Academy, when he and George would hand over their puddings. Sapnap tells him a lot of things, like what to do if someone threatens or attacks him, and to come and call him no matter what. He reminds him that it isn't permanent, and Quackity will stop the alliance if anything goes wrong. He promises that.

"I want The Academy down more than anything," Sapnap sighs. "But you're my priority."

Tommy's cheeks heat. "Shut the fuck up."

"How do you feel?" He questions. "About staying with the Syndicate?"

"I don't think I care, yet," Tommy shrugs and takes a bite of his food. "It will be fine."

"Will it?" Sapnap furthers. "What if you get a nightmare?"

Tommy's cheeks heat again. "Shut up, Sapnap," he hisses and shoves his shoulder. He hates that his older has so much against him and can embarrass him so easily.

"I know," Sapnap smiles smugly. "That he's the only one who can stop them."

"What the actual fuck?!"

Sapnap ignores him. "You need him, as much as he needs you. He helps you, and you help him."

"I don't get nightmares," Tommy grumbles.

"Okay then," Sapnap leans back in his seat, after finishing his meal. "But I know that dream of the past, and Dream is the only one who can help you from them."

Dream tells him to breathe, and Tommy listens. Dream is the one who controls his panic attacks and reassures him when he is stressed and unready. He is the one there with him during The Academy, with the most faith on his shoulders than any other person. And Dream stands next to him, as he presses a gun to the temple of a man, and whispers for him to shoot.

To survive, Dream has always made sure Tommy does.

"Yeah," Tommy eventually says. "Yeah."

"You'll be okay," Sapnap reassures. "You have me. And you'll always have Dream."

They begin when the night is alive.

The moon is under the clutches of the surrounding darkness, and the stars bring a bright litter of light with the ghastly company of the quiet midnight. The moon does not shine tonight, and it hides

between white clouds.

“*One minute,*” Dream breathes in his mind. “*Start counting, Theseus. Now.*”

Theseus counts. Theseus waits. Theseus moves.

He is Sixteen, and he is on his final mission; to escape. He grabs the duffel bags that have been lying with the cobwebs under his bed for weeks and pulls his black shoes. He must be fast; he must not hesitate.

Twenty seconds and he is out of the dorms. He presses the keypad with a card and presses his pressure against the noisy doors, so they do not have a loud noise when they open. He pushes his hair back and ditches the hallway and heads towards the Graduate dorms.

He meets Dream’s dorm room at twenty-seven seconds. He is two seconds slow.

He pulls the door open and notices Dream is not present. He pushes to his bed and pulls out the extra keys that hide under his cushion. He grabs the remaining money in his drawers and shoves them into his bag.

Thirty-five seconds and he is out of the door. He is an assassin, he is quiet and stealthy, and fast. His legs move and his eyes analyze, and he embraces his title as the best of his class because that is who he is.

Theseus then hears a noise, and ducks behind a wall.

“I heard a noise,” Someone says. “Check the younger dorms. Check again.”

The voice disappears, and Theseus is running out of time. He must get to Sapnap’s dorm first, and the George’s. Until then, can he join the three outside. This is a plan, and it must go accordingly. He collects the keys and cards from Dream’s room and the food from Sapnap’s. He goes to George’s, for the weapons as he does not have access for his own. They do, as they are Graduates and trusted with such privileges.

They tell him to go to each room, so he is not alone for long. They make him recite the plan until his mouth is dry.

They will escape tonight, and Theseus almost tastes the sweetness of freedom.

But then he arrives at Sapnap’s room, and the food is not there, and George is not in his location with the acquired weapons. *They do not wait for him*, he almost thinks. They leave without him.

They will wait, he trusts. They are his brothers, and they will complete this mission together. No one is left behind, no one.

Theseus must think of something – quick – when he finds George’s bedroom left with emptiness. But that is George’s part, to come up with the idea. Sapnap inputs and Dream leads. Theseus follows.

He decides he must go to the training halls himself. It is on the other side of the grounds, far away from Dream’s meeting spot, but he needs weapons. He must protect himself, and he cannot with bare fists and raw skin.

The only problem with his idea is that the training halls are not direct access to the weapon rooms. And he doesn’t have the available keys there, George has not left them behind.

He makes it to the training hall in one piece. His eyes scan the cold room, and he feels loneliness. He sees the blood smeared on the floors, and the dents in the corner wall from poorly thrown knives and daggers. He pushes to the room on the left and bites his lip from letting out a groan when the door is sealed closed, and he cannot enter.

Dream is waiting outside, he thinks.

Ten minutes after midnight, Dream tells him the previous afternoon. *Ten minutes, and if I'm not there, then you leave yourself.*

Ten minutes may pass room and Theseus knows Dream may soon be gone. So, he hurries.

He grabs the sharpest objects he can find from the training hall. Not much, as its contents are rolled mats and wooden sticks. He finds a broken handcuff to shove into the lock on the doors. When that doesn't work, he uses the wood to yank the inside open. It doesn't budge.

Theseus grumbles and composes himself. He is an assassin; he will figure this out.

So, he shoves the wooden stick into the door again, until he claws it into it. He grunts, as the edge of his fingers, rip into the metal, and he uses his strength the wrench them outwards.

He almost falls over when the doors slide open automatically, somehow. He does not know how he has mustered the strength, but he does not listen to the voice of his mind as he rushes in to grab the proper wear and weapons.

"Hey!" Someone shouts and a trigger sets inside of him, but Theseus takes only two seconds to flicker a knife back at the sound. He turns quickly, to see a guard staggering back, a blade to his shoulder.

He frowns, but he has not missed accidentally.

We do not kill, Dream says in their plan. *We escape.*

Theseus escapes. He ditches the man that shouts at him, and rushes back to Sapnap's room, with the hope he is there waiting for him. He wears shouts from behind, and blood runs through his ears as his heart races, adrenaline spiking through his blood.

A siren rings through his ears. He makes it to Sapnap's room, and he is not there.

Fuck, he swears and hears people. Sounds, and alarms. Theseus must remain composed. He must follow the plan set. But how does he, when Sapnap is not here, and George isn't either?

Theseus' breathing fastens. He clings onto the doorframe and feels like he's drowning. But he is an assassin, and he must not give up. Dream tells him, that they will all leave because they deserve something better than this. They should not be confined between the stoned walls, because they deserve to be free.

Dream tells him that he has a chance of a normal life, to be sixteen. A real sixteen-year-old.

Theseus takes his offer with no hesitation.

But now, he hesitates.

Two guards find him and pull out their tasers. Theseus fights back, taking out his knives, and aiming at them, as he dodges their arms. He pushes one back, and swings at the other, making an

effort to escape because the sounds continue, and more people find them.

He hears the surroundings become louder, and shoves the cards onto scanners to escape rooms, saluting at the people who are stopped at the doors that close behind him. Dream would be disappointed because they are meant to be stealthy and leave carefully, but Theseus has been the opposite,

He won't make it in time, he realizes. He is too far away – even with the fast pace he sprints.

The sirens fasten. His mind screams.

Theseus, he hears Dream somewhere. *To the left, then the right.*

He follows his mind, his legs picking up and his eyes on wide alert. His blades flinger with his fingers, and he throws the weapons at sudden noises he hears. The sirens are only a distant memory when he feels crisp night air.

Theseus then sees the outside; the large grass field where they run until they collapse and are sick.

One last run, he must do. Then through the forest, past the trees, and climb the stoned wall. He will meet Dream past them, in a car on a road. They will escape with Sapnap and George.

But they aren't here, Theseus almost cries for the first time since he was ten. He doesn't, rubbing his face with his cold fingers, and running until his heart stops. His bags feel like a burden, but he can't let go of them because he carries what Dream can't fit in his own bags.

When he gets to the forest, Theseus jumps over roots and uses branches to pull himself off sharp rocks and edges. He hears sounds behind him, and his legs pounding against the dirt, but he knows that it is his mind.

The stoned wall will be the hardest, he realizes. He must use his upper body strength and pull himself to the other side. They contemplate taking the front of The Academy but are guarded at night and they cannot make any mistake. His heart burns and his mind is frozen, as his mind thinks of endless possibilities while he rushes. He doesn't control himself anymore, in a state of shock with the previous events.

His legs and arms do all of the work next. He puts his training to the test and climbs the crumbling walls.

Theseus does not look back.

He groans when he must get back down, using edging rocks as support. He does not have a net under him, he never does.

Theseus jumps down, panting with sweat down his forehead. His arms are weak, and he can't walk longer.

The car is not far away. He sees it in the distance.

He does not register he has escaped. He does not register that he will never go back.

When Theseus makes it to Dream, he finally falls.

"Sapnap and George," he breathes and breaks down. "They weren't *there*."

"Theseus," Dream says.

“We have to do something – they can’t stay there!” It is his fault that he did nothing, that he didn’t stay. “There were sirens, and people after me and—”

“Theseus,” Dream says slowly. “There weren’t any sirens.”

“What?” Theseus stutters.

“I would have heard them from here, there weren’t any,” he frowns. “Get in the car, we can’t wait any longer.”

Theseus is damp with sweat and he cannot feel himself, any longer. Dream drives forward, and Theseus feels the emptiest he has felt ever before.

He sees the walls disappear from view. He hates himself because Sapnap and George are back there and he didn’t fucking do anything. His mind has been crazy and sick for ages, and he imagines sounds sometimes. If he hadn’t noticed sooner – that there weren’t any sirens, he would not have been so stressed to leave. He wouldn’t have left them behind.

His brothers.

“They’ll escape,” Dream promises. “We can’t go back for them, not until we are safe. Sapnap will think of something, I believe in them.”

Theseus is silent.

“We will live new lives, Theseus. We will be new people, and one day – we will return to our old lives and they’ll be free.”

“We’ll escape,” One day, Dream promises. “You, me. George, Sapnap.”

But now, it is just him and Dream.

“It’s just you and me,” Dream voices his thoughts.

And like the walls that surround The Academy, that will one day crumble, his life does too.

Tommy meets Phil and says goodbye to Quackity and Sapnap. Dream does not come.

He wears a mask because Phil knows he is Theseus – not Tommy. Dream makes sure he does, and Sapnap tells him to never take it off around them. Quackity pats him on his shoulder and tells him that they’ll see each other soon.

“Theseus,” Philza greets. “We haven’t formally met, have we?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. He’s not in the mood to talk.

"I've been introduced to you by XD and Quackity. Never yourself."

Theseus stares blankly at him.

Philza sighs. "That's okay then, mate."

Theseus has not felt so alone before. Only moments ago, Sapnap was with him, reassuring him that this arrangement would not be for long, and only to ensure Phil did not let go of their alliance. Sapnap told him to make sure he used their facility to their advantage and report back anything interesting. He also says that he does not have to do this. But Tommy knows he does.

Philza watches him weirdly. He makes the same face, he makes when Sapnap hugs him before. Tommy almost thinks that Phil is like the Headmaster and will shout and reprimand him for touching Sapnap – he was never allowed to at The Academy.

"Let's get you settled in then," Phil says after a silence.

Tommy won't make this easy for him. He will be difficult; he will be silent and not speak. He will ignore him and stay in his room or train all day. He will not give anything away, and he will not certainly allow himself to get close to Wilbur Soot again.

Philza gives him a tour of the agency. It is large, as he remembers it. Large rooms and hallways and their facility are truly extraordinary. There are a couple of elevators situation around, but the one in his office can only be used by him, his close staff, and his sons.

"You can use it too," Philza offers once.

Phil then shows him the dorm locations, and where the ranking of agents goes.

"I usually do not sleep on the grounds," Philza explains. "But for the next couple of months, I will be."

"Where's my room?" Tommy asks blankly, his first words to him.

Phil brightens and Tommy almost scowls. He does not particularly like him.

"Your room will be close to my sons', Wilbur and Techno. They'll help you around, and get settled in." Tommy doesn't enjoy the arrangement, as he hopes to be far away as them as possible and to be situated in a smaller room, in another building with their other agents. "Breakfast will be at seven. If you want to avoid the rush, that's fine, but I would appreciate your company at dinner."

Tommy won't attend. He has to be here, for the alliance. He does not have to comply.

"Wilbur is excited to have you around," Philza leads him to his room and chooses his words carefully. "If you have any requests, just inform one of us."

"And missions?" Tommy then asks.

"What?"

"Mission," Tommy repeats. "Will I complete any?"

"No!" Philza stresses as if that is an absurd idea and he isn't speaking to one of the best former assassins of The Academy. "You won't complete any, you're far too young."

He almost deadpans, *I started training when I was ten*, but holds it in for Philza's sake.

Philza arrives at Tommy's room. "And this is yours." Inside is a plain bed, and painting. There are drawers and uniforms on the hook, as well as spare clothes and towels. Lucky for Tommy, he has brought his own clothes with him.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Philza assumes he won't see Tommy for the rest of the day, and he is right. He won't. "I'll tell Wilbur to bring you dinner."

Tommy stares into his room and turns to Phil when he knows he is still staring. Phil's bright blue eyes that seem like his own, watch him for a second.

"You take off your mask now," he offers.

"No," Tommy denies.

"That's okay," Phil sighs. "I hope you settle in well, Theseus."

Tommy frowns as the door closes behind him.

Welcome home, Theseus, Philza thinks.

Chapter End Notes

the fun begins next chapter!!

i have aphantasia so tell me if any action scenes don't turn out well, so i'll fix them.
they're the hardest to write because i can't see the scene lmao

ty for reading!

Brother

Chapter Summary

Green eyes meet blue.

Together, they take on the world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy glares at his ceiling. He flicks the knife in his hand, upwards, and it slices through the ceiling.

He has been at the *Syndicate* for three days now. His routine now consists of waking up in the early mornings to train by himself, eat an occasional meal, and then lock himself in his room and drift in and out of unconsciousness. The cycle then repeats.

Tommy avoids Wilbur and does not look at Techno. He stays away from Phil and keeps to himself.

He feels the most alone he has ever felt, in a long time.

He has Dream and Sapnap. Once, he had George. But now he is trapped between white walls and feels nothing but exhaustion.

He utilizes the time by training and exercise, and uses the facility and equipment to his advantage, slowly forming into shape as he once is. Once, he was one of the best assassins of The Academy, so he wishes to regain his previous form.

Tommy is an assassin again, even though he isn't. He wakes up at six in the early morning and trains without breaking a sweat. He pushes his body to its limits and focuses on himself.

However, when Technoblade comes to watch him train, Tommy leaves in an instant. He will not show them any part of him; he refuses to give out any part of himself either. He will not get close, nor will he allow Techno to reach out as he attempts to do so.

There is a knock on the door then, as there usually is. It is sometimes Philza, asking him if he will join dinner. He will not respond, and Phil will leave.

Today, the knocking does not stop. He picks up his knife under the pillow and points it at the door, contemplating whether to throw it or not. He decides not to and places it beside him again.

"Theseus?" A voice calls from outside, that sounds familiar to Wilbur. "Can I come in?"

Tommy does not respond.

"Theseus?" Wilbur repeats.

Tommy does not like the glances Wilbur gives him, because he cannot recognize them. He is trained to, yet there is a sight in Wilbur's eyes that he can't pinpoint, and it frustrates him to no end.

He is trained to read body language and detect gestures and small movements, yet Wilbur stumps him.

He is readable when he speaks to *Tommy*. When Tommy used to talk to Wilbur at the bakery, Wilbur was decipherable and easy to understand. But when Wilbur speaks to *Theseus*, he is more apprehensive and *unusual*.

“Theseus?” Wilbur repeats and Theseus almost forgets he is here. “I’m opening the door!”

Tommy is about to shout a response, to tell him to fuck off – but he doesn’t. He stays silent and pulls on his mask once again.

Wilbur steps into his bare room, and a frown fits his face when he sees Tommy’s disguise. Phil urges him to take it off every day, and they ask why he wears one. He does not answer them.

“Are you okay?” Wilbur questions, stepping awkwardly into the room and glancing around. The room is empty and plain, and Philza had to remove the painting after Tommy had torn holes into it with his knife. Apparently, it costs a lot, but he doesn’t care.

Wilbur’s eyes are brown and concerned. His words are kind. “We didn’t see you at breakfast or lunch today. Have you eaten?”

He hasn’t. He’s hungry, but Tommy doesn’t feel like eating.

“I know you don’t want to be here,” Wilbur then says. “But it’s only safe this way.”

Tommy disagrees.

“Can you at least work with us, here?” Wilbur pleads. “We’re trying to make this as easy as possible.”

Tommy picks up his knife. He still lays down on his bed, but he aims it at Wilbur, steadying his fingers.

Wilbur flinches.

Tommy smirks and throws it. It tears into the wall behind him but misses him by almost half an inch.

Wilbur turns around fast and lurches to the wall, where he pulls out the knife. He groans, “Phil isn’t going to be happy with the holes.”

Tommy shrugs and stares at the room, his arms pulled up behind his pillow. Wilbur stares at the ceiling, and groans again and the array of secondary holes he finds up there.

“You can’t keep doing that...” But he swallows the rest of his words when he realizes they don’t mean anything to the young assassin. “Get up. We’re doing something today.”

“No,” Tommy speaks suddenly.

Wilbur seems pleased to get a phrase out of him – Tommy hasn’t spoken any words for the last couple of days. “Well, you’re going to eat something.”

Tommy frowns. “Get out, Wilbur.”

“I’ll grab Phil.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and breaks his silent rule of not holding a conversation with him. “I don’t give a fuck,”

Wilbur’s eyes sparkle.

Tommy has not realized how brown they are, until now. They are the color of dark oak of a rainforest, and they become soft of caramel when he smiles.

Tommy picks up another knife. He aims it at Wilbur, who yelps.

“I’ll be back!” He calls, and his mood has brightened. Tommy scowls to himself because he doesn’t want to satisfy him like that. “Don’t go anywhere!” Tommy doesn’t plan to; he can’t really leave.

When Wilbur goes, Tommy stands up and stretches. He pulls off his mask as if feels suffocating and smothering. Tommy had scoped the area for cameras and microphones the first time he had stepped into the room and had surprisingly found nothing. He is still cautious, and eyes every inch of the walls as if any part will crash into him.

Tommy then retrieves the knives edged into the walls and spins the weapon between his fingers. His eyes keep on the sharp blade and relaxes within the hold of it. It allows him to concentrate and relax, and the metallic blade skids across his skin

Wilbur returns with a plate of food. He knocks on the door, and Tommy swipes his mask off the bed and shoves it on with one arm, the other spinning the knife. Wilbur knocks once, and then barges in, to blink suddenly when he sees Tommy is off the bed, and now standing.

“You’re good at that,” he commentates, staring at the blade. “But put it down. And eat.”

Tommy stares at the food. It is cooked vegetables and chicken. He misses Dream’s horrible cooking.

(Dream’s cooking isn’t horrible, though. He says it is, so he misses it less.)

Wilbur shoves the plate in Tommy’s hands and forces him to sit on the bed to eat. The boy keeps his knives close to him, and Wilbur notices, clearly. “You weren’t taught to not play with knives?”

Tommy glances up from the plate of food in his lap and stares emotionless at the man. Wilbur attempts to stir an emotion out of him, but Tommy refuses to budge. “No, I wasn’t.”

Wilbur bites his lip and watches Tommy carefully. “You can take off your mask, you know. You don’t want to get it stained.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders and stares at the plate of food in front of him.

“Do I need to feed you?” Wilbur teases.

Tommy glares and does not say anything. Wilbur sighs, and sits down carefully on the floor, his back leaned against the wall. “Phil said I can’t leave until you finish your plate.”

“Phil is not my father,”

Wilbur stares. For a really long time. “You’re his responsibility, Quackity won’t be pleased if he finds out we haven’t been feeding you – which we have.”

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. Do they honestly think Quackity has any control over him?

“What was that look like?”

“What look?” Tommy asks, innocent.

Wilbur sighs and leans his head back. “You pulled a face, you don’t usually.”

Tommy blinks and stares at his food again. The faster he eats, the faster Wilbur can leave, so he starts. He picks up a smaller carrot and takes a small bite.

“Do you not like the food?” Wilbur then asks.

Tommy shrugs his shoulders and Wilbur sighs again.

“You know, it wouldn’t hurt to talk,” Wilbur grumbles. “You may not like us, but you’re stuck with us for now. Techno notices you finish training when he arrives.”

“I intend for him to notice.”

“You are a gremlin,” Something flashes through Wilbur’s pupils. “You remind me of someone.”

Tommy wonders if Wilbur hints at him. Not Theseus, but Tommy.

“Shut up,” Tommy rebuts and turns away. “Let me eat in peace.”

“I can’t go, Phil’s words, not mine,” Wilbur shrugs his shoulders, nonchalantly. “Not my fault.”

“I don’t like you.”

“I know.”

“Good,” Tommy takes a bite of his potato and sits it to the side. “I finished; you can leave now.”

Wilbur stares at him incredulously. “You took two bites.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders again.

Wilbur groans, and stands up, annoyed. “Theseus.”

Tommy is sick of this interaction and he’s sick of Wilbur. He wants to throw knives at the wall and think of the past, he does not want to talk to Wilbur who will peer into his brain and pull him apart. Wilbur is smart and kind, he will force him to open up with his words, and soon – Tommy will be confiding with him as Theseus.

He won’t make the same mistake twice; he won’t do the same thing again.

“I’ll go,” Wilbur announces. “You can eat alone, but if Phil asks you, then I was here the whole time.”

“I’m not promising a thing.”

Wilbur gives him a dazzling smile, but it seems dead. “Great, okay then.” Wilbur leaves and Tommy is alone again.

He finds it humorous that he despises Wilbur’s presence yet yearns for it when he leaves. But then he reminds himself that Wilbur’s family has placed him in this situation and that he only wants Wilbur with him because he is bored and lonely. *Not for any other reason*, he repeats in his mind

over again.

Tommy manages to get the rest of the food down, but he sets it aside with the chicken untouched. He usually has a good appetite, but he struggles today, and he is not sure why. He misses Dream's cooking and treats from the bakery – he misses what was his past.

Tommy should not miss things. He should not grow attachments to places and people. But he does.

Wilbur returns, while Tommy spins knives between his fingers and flickers the blade, to reveal the shine.

“You keep your knives with you,” he comments.

“Don't touch them,” Tommy grumbles.

“I won't, I won't,” Wilbur eyes them carefully. “Aren't you worried you'll hurt yourself?”

Tommy scoffs. “No,” He's hurt himself before, the blood does not hurt anymore.

Wilbur presses his lips together and takes his discarded plate. “Let's go, then.”

“I'm not going anywhere with you.”

“Philza's orders,” Wilbur rolls his eyes. “Let's go, kid.”

Tommy growls, “I'm not a child.”

“You're not a day over seventeen, Theseus.”

He's not wrong. But Tommy will be seventeen in a couple of months. He's far older, mentally. His experiences will never be what others will ever have to go through – he had to develop into the changed circumstances and force himself to grow up.

Wilbur waits for Tommy to get out of his bed. His eyebrows are raised and he taps his feet on the carpet. Tommy stares back at him, knowing he won't leave until Tommy joins him.

Tommy sighs. “Lead the way, I guess.”

Wilbur smiles and nods his head. He takes him to a lower floor and introduces him to other parts that the boy has not seen anymore. Techno's first tour was cut short after all.

“We have a kitchen, and the cooks here make the food for meals,” Wilbur explains.

Tommy rolls his eyes – he doesn't care.

Wilbur does, and he is not afraid to show it. They go to separate rooms, the offices, and extra meal rooms. Tommy doesn't know why this place is so big, and why they need so much room. At The Academy, rooms were fairly small, and they had to adjust to the spacing. It was only when the classes lost students, could they have more freedom of movement.

(When the other students lost their breaths, could they breathe better.)

“Theseus?” Wilbur then asks and Tommy glances at him. “Are you listening?” He nods his head strictly. “Phil wants us in his office.”

“Why?” Tommy's voice changes, into a harder, colder tone.

Wilbur notices immediately. “Don’t worry – he just wants to check up on you.”

Tommy does not believe him, but Wilbur is right. Philza greets them with a small smile and an encouraging nod. “Theseus, sit down.”

Theseus watches the seat, and then Wilbur. If he is seated, he does not have a chance of escape. However, he has brought his knives with him – he does not want to take any chances, though.

Wilbur and Phil notice his apprehension. They exchange wary glances. “Or you can stay standing,” Wilbur offers, and Tommy does.

“I want to know how you’re settling in,” Phil questions. “How are you finding the training grounds? Do you like your room?”

For some reason, Philza reminds Tommy of his Headmaster. It isn’t his voice or the way they look – but there is something that makes Tommy’s stomach stir. His chin straightens and he fixes his posture.

“It’s fine, sir.”

“You – you don’t have to call me, sir,” Phil stumbles and watches Wilbur for help. “Phil is fine.”

Tommy nods his head and Phil sighs.

“Will you join us for dinner?” Philza asks him, then. “Tomorrow?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. But maybe Phil wants a verbal answer. (Dream reminds him to use verbal answers with the Headmaster.) “I’m not sure,”

“That’s okay,” Phil says softly. “We have time. I wanted to introduce you to the others, of course.”

Tommy’s eyes widen. “That isn’t needed.”

“Are you sure–?”

“Phil,” Wilbur cuts his father off quickly. “He doesn’t want that. We’ll introduce him to Tubbo, and Ranboo separately.”

“Of course, of course.” Tommy’s mind is away for the rest of their conversation, because he is reminded of Tubbo, and remembers the friend he once had. Tubbo – who he hasn’t spoken to, in weeks. Tubbo, who was probably worried and likely stopped caring for him, long ago.

“Theseus,” Philza then says. “I hope you know that you can speak to me of anything. We’re here to help you.”

Tommy disagrees but nods his head anyway. He is lucky when Wilbur stands, so they can leave. Although, he isn’t too lucky when he arrives back to his room, and Wilbur enters with him.

“I’m sorry about, Phil,” Wilbur apologizes. “He wants you to settle in, that’s all.”

“I don’t need to settle; I won’t be here for long.”

Wilbur frowns.

Tommy wonders what he is thinking of.

But Wilbur leaves soon, and he's alone once more.

He falls asleep afterward. Tommy is tired. It is not sleepiness that consumes him, it is his mind.

They stay at the apartment for one night and leave the following morning.

Their days consist of hiding and watching. Tommy stays in the apartment alone at times, with knives out and a gun on the table. Dream returns with food and water, and they leave afterward.

Days are endless, time is one.

Their days are consistent and morph into one. Tommy – who starts to get used to his new name and a new identity – sleeps in the car while Dream drives. They sometimes swap over, but Dream does not trust his driving because it is George who teaches him.

("George can't drive for shit," Dream laughs, but the tiredness in his eyes makes him sound hollow. "So, I'll drive, and when I can't – you will.")

Dream does do most of the driving though and sleeps when they arrive at apartments and hotels. There, they register and book in with new and odd names.

One day, Dream says they don't have to run for any longer.

Following that day, everything goes to shit.

They are raided with assassins. They may not be from The Academy, because life is a blur, and they arrive in their car, panting and their heart racing. Tommy has a gash to his arm from a sharp blade, but Dream is left untouched. He is the best after all.

Tommy treats the wound in the car. They attempt to make a joke of it.

"Stop!" Tommy complains. "If you do, I'm going to needle your eye."

"I'll throw you out of the car."

"I'll find you and slash your tires."

"Did Sapnap show you how?" Dream raises his eyebrows.

Tommy's snicker is the answer he needs.

Sometimes, through endless traveling, they forget the mission they set ought to do, in the first place. Although, it is usually Tommy who complains and forgets to speak – as he is wrapped in his thoughts. They have been on the run for almost two months, and Tommy wonders if he is forgetting himself.

“You are Theseus – you are Tommy,” Dream must remind him. “And you are determined to live.”

He is until he isn’t.

“You know,” Dream murmurs one month, under the stars. They lay on a roof, and peer into the city.

Tommy watches Dream carefully. “What?” He asks between the coolness of the air.

“You know why I chose you?” Tommy shakes his head. “As our fourth?”

Tommy freezes, and Dream assumes it is because of the cold because he asks him if he wants a jacket. The nights are colder, in California.

Dream continues with his story. “Sapnap and George didn’t believe in me when I chose you. They saw you throw a knife at a target and figured out that you weren’t going to last a while.”

Tommy knows this part of their past.

“But I saw a lot of you, in me,” Dream says, and Tommy doesn’t know this. “I could see my younger self in you.”

“Really?”

“One day,” Dream says slowly. “You’ll be better than me. You’ll be Sapnap and George, and you will achieve greatness.”

Tommy’s eyes widen. Because Dream has never complimented him like this before. He’s strict and hardly apologizes because he finds it hard to. And Dream rarely compliments anyone.

“But,” Dream then says. “I’ve noticed recently, you’re out of it.”

“Well, all we do is travel.”

“Don’t give up,” Dream says and watches his eyes. A familiar gesture, where he searches for something inside of him. A confirmation; maybe more. “You’ll survive, we both will.”

“George says he does not care,” Tommy says quietly. “What if I want to be more like him? I don’t want to care as much.”

“Well, do,” Dream says. “George is George – you are Tommy. He cares, he is too afraid to admit it. You will persist with me, you will continue.”

“And if I won’t?”

Dream grins. “Well, wouldn’t you like to know?” They get into a fight and must stop before they wake up the neighbors or fall off the roof. Or both.

“We will do this,” Dream says. “Together.”

It is Dream and Tommy, they decide the night they leave and many months afterward. And they will survive, together.

Green eyes meet blue.

Together, they take on the world.

Tommy cannot sleep at night.

(He won't tell anyone, but he hasn't slept since he's arrived at the Syndicate.

Although there really isn't anyone he *can* tell.)

He stares at the ceiling, as he does for hours every day. Sometimes he throws knives but stops since it's dark and he cuts his palm over.

(Wilbur notices the next day and forces him to do the medical bay. He refuses and locks the door. He doesn't try that again.)

Instead, Tommy decides that tonight, he'll sneak out.

He's lasted four days at their base, which is four days long enough. And of course, he'll return the following morning. Tommy needs to see Sapnap and Dream. He needs to make sure they are okay.

He's the youngest out of them, and Dream tells Tommy numerous times that it is his own job to make sure Tommy is okay, it's his responsibility, not the other way around. But Tommy disagrees – and plus, he's been meaning to do something interesting. He is bored between the walls; it reminds him of The Academy.

So, Tommy escapes when the moon meets the stars, and the clouds disappear. He steps into the darkness and is followed by silence. He remembers his way around, it's easy with his memory.

Tommy walks through the corridor of Wilbur, Techno, and his room. He finds it strange, why he is so close to them. His mind brings it up once or twice, the strangeness of the situation but he drops it when his mind aches and fatigue hurts his eyes.

Tommy leaves the corridor swiftly; he is an assassin after all. He arrives at the elevator and steps in, to press a button fast, while glancing down each hallway as the doors close. The light above him is bright, and the mirror beside him reminds him that he is unrecognizable with his mask on – he can't risk anyone being awake.

The elevator then stops and shakes. Someone is awake.

Tommy stands protectively and takes the knives out of his pocket, as the doors open. A boy steps in, sucking on a juice box. He does not glance at him, as he presses a button on a lower floor, and steps back.

Tommy watches him weirdly.

“I’m Tubbo,” The boy speaks randomly and Tommy blinks. “And you’re Theseus.”

Tubbo? Tommy can hardly recognize him; his brown hair is longer, and he is slightly paler.

Tubbo turns to him finally, the straw to his lips. The sound that fills Tommy’s ears is the descending sounds of the elevator and his slurping. Tubbo doesn’t stop and continues staring.

“So, you’re Theseus,” he repeats and hums. “Okay, then.”

Tommy hopes his floor can come faster. He sees Tubbo’s eyes focusing on his closer, and he knows the mask is not good enough. Tubbo is about to admit he knows it is Tommy.

Only he doesn’t. “You are sixteen.”

Tommy frowns instantly.

“Everyone is saying different things,” Tubbo shrugs and lifts the straw to his lips again. “Ranboo says you look eighteen. Wilbur says you’re a child.”

Tommy splutters.

Tubbo laughs. “Let’s go do something.” The doors open, and he steps out, his heart turned back, to wait for Tommy’s next move. Tommy follows him.

They go down the hall, and Tubbo tosses his juice into a nearby trashcan. He leads him to a metal door and swipes a card for them to enter.

Inside, Tommy widens his eyes. Bean bags are stacked across the side of the walls, and there are large-screened computers and arcade games, similar to the ones Tommy had seen when he went with Dream and Wilbur. What makes Tommy angry is that he had not known there was anything like this at Philza’s – the air hockey table and monitors, to access the internet.

“Make yourself at home,” Tubbo grabs a juice box from the fridge, and tosses it at Tommy. His throw is bad, but Tommy catches it in one hand, without looking. “Nice.”

Tommy sits on one of the beanbags and watches Tubbo as he takes a seat down on the ground. “I prefer the floor,” is his reasoning.

Tommy nods his head.

“You know, if I wasn’t so sleep-deprived, I’d think twice about letting an assassin into my top-secret base.”

“Top secret?” Tommy speaks for the first time.

“It’s not that top-secret, but not many people know about it. It’s hard to get your own privacy when there are so many people around.” Tommy nods his head – with that he can agree. “Wilbur knows, and Ranboo. So does Techno, and a couple others you haven’t met yet.”

Tommy looks around. His eyes linger on the arcade games.

“You can play them if you want. I think I’m going to try and get some sleep – which reminds me,” Tubbo pauses, and Tommy stiffens. “What were you doing awake?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. Tubbo purses his lips.

“Insomnia?” Tommy shrugs at Tubbo’s words. It’s strange talking to him, and not being him. It’s weird being Theseus when he isn’t. “My sister Niki makes this good tea to fall asleep faster. You should try it.”

Tommy can’t admit he has nightmares of his past. He won’t admit it to anyone, that Dream is the only person who can stop them. Sometimes, he hates being so dependent on someone – having learned connections will kill you if you let them.

“Tell me about yourself, Theseus,” Tubbo yawns, covering his mouth as he blinks. He tosses his juice to the side and stretches his arms. “What’s your life been like? How many knives you can throw at once?”

“I haven’t tested it, yet,” Tommy ignores his former question.

“We’ll test it on Wilbur, later,” Tubbo grins. “Give me more. Philza says you won’t tell him a thing.”

“I don’t trust him,” Tommy deadpans.

“He’ll keep you safe, here,”

“He took me away from my family.”

“The Academy?” Tubbo widens his left eye a fraction.

“No,” Tommy says quickly and seals his lips closed.

“I don’t know much,” Tubbo reassures with his hands in a surrender position. “I don’t know much at all. And I won’t tell Philza a thing you tell me.”

Tommy trusts Tubbo. But Theseus does not.

“I’ll tell you a bit about myself then,” Tubbo shuffles in his seat. “I’m Tubbo, and I have an older sister, and I work for Philza.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Tommy looks away, uncertainly.

“I don’t know,” Tubbo shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t have many people to talk to around here, besides Ranboo. It’s nice to have company.”

If Tommy’s ever felt guilt, he feels it now more than ever.

“I used to live with Niki and my father. But we moved and we were homeless for a long time,” Tubbo sighs. “Phil found us, though. Niki owns a bakery now, and I work for him. He’s helped us a lot.”

“Everyone likes, Phil,” Tommy comments.

Tubbo smiles. “What’s not to like? He’s the coolest guy – the only man ever. He helps anyone he can, and he cares a lot.”

Tommy frowns because he knows Philza does not care about the assassins who are forced into this life. Philza protects him but is not willing to protect the rest of the assassins, at The Academy – which he is very willing to take down.

“Your turn,” Tubbo then states. “Go,” he cracks his head to the side, and Tommy plays with his plastic straw as he ponders if he will truly answer.

He will give information away as Theseus, and he does not know if he can afford that. But Tubbo watches him with pure curiosity and promises he won’t tell Philza. Tommy trusts Tubbo – they were once friends. Well, not exactly trust – but there was a friendship between them.

So, Tommy says, “I have two brothers,” because he can afford to give any more information away.

Tubbo smiles, genuine.

“Really?” he asks. “Tell me ‘bout them.”

“I would rather not.”

Tubbo chuckles. “Fair enough.” He grabs another juice for himself. “I’ve recently been introduced to tropical juice, and I’ve formed an addiction.” Tommy stares blankly at his own juice box, and carefully shoves his straw between the hole. He takes a sip, and flavor explodes in his mouth.

“Good, right?” And they relax in silence. Tommy’s guard is silently down when Tubbo falls asleep and Wilbur storms into the bedroom.

“Tubbo!” He shouts, frantic. “Theseus isn’t in his room!”

Tubbo wakes up fast, and Tommy blinks.

“Tubbo!” Wilbur rounds the corner and almost falls back when his eyes meet Tommy’s. He splutters and his face turns red. “What the fuck?”

“Wilbur,” Tubbo groans and rubs his eyes. “Get the fuck out.”

Wilbur storms to them and points a finger at the brown-haired boy. “Did you kidnap him? I told you to give him time to settle in!”

Tubbo’s sleep-deprived and angry at the sudden noise. “I didn’t! We were both awake, fuck off. You woke me up.”

Wilbur quietens. “Were you asleep?” he asks, slowly.

“Yeah,” Tubbo grumbles and frowns. “Thanks, Wilbur.”

“I’m sorry, Tubbo.”

“Whatever,” he yawns.

Wilbur turns to Tommy then. “Theseus, why were you awake?”

Tommy watches him blankly and does not speak. Wilbur mutters words under his breath, following the words of ‘*someone help me*’ or along the lines, as his words jumbled and mumbled.

“Theseus,” Wilbur says plainly. “You were awake?”

“Yes,” he admits quietly.

“And why was that?” His voice is slow and almost threatening. Tommy’s fingers inch toward the knife in his pocket. Wilbur notices and stands back, his arms up in surrender. “I was worried,”

“Don’t be,” Tommy grits his teeth, and his fingers feel the blade in his pocket. The cold touch almost soothes him.

“Theseus told me about his brothers,” Tubbo says, his eyes closed, and his words stretched. Tommy stares at him, betrayed. “How he’s not with them anymore.”

“Brothers?” Wilbur echoes his words, his face forming.

“Two brothers,” Tubbo yawns and lays down again to sleep. “Am I right, Theseus?”

Tommy stills. “Yes.”

“Brothers?” Wilbur repeats, louder.

“The ones you took from me,” Tommy frowns. “My family.”

“Your *family*?” Wilbur blinks. “What?”

Tommy stands and flickers out his knife. He will not throw it, he simply keeps it between his fingers, for Wilbur to understand to not try anything. He doesn’t trust Wilbur. “It doesn’t matter. I’m leaving.”

“No – Theseus,” Wilbur stops him. “Tell me about them.”

“Why should I?”

“Tell me,” Wilbur repeats, and Tommy groans.

“They’re my family,” he says slowly. “And now I’m here, and you took them away from me.”

He leaves.

He is different from who his mind remembers. Theseus is cold and unapproachable. He is unreadable and freezes at sudden movement and touch. Scars peak from his sleeves and he speaks apprehensively.

Years ago, his younger brother is warm and happy. He grins and laughs between every word that leaves his mouth.

“Brothers?” Wilbur replies emotionlessly because that is all he can say as Theseus leaves the room, his fists formed and a push in his step. Tubbo is asleep again, and Wilbur feels alone.

He tells Philza the following morning.

“XD, another member of The Academy,” His father tells him. “Their best student.”

Wilbur finds out about XD and how they likely grew a friendship between the walls of the institution. However, it grew into a brotherhood, as their horrible experiences forced each other to bond. They are brothers, Wilbur thinks and yearns for the day he can have his brother back.

“You have to wait,” Philza then tells him. “Patience, Wilbur. Let him settle in, and we’ll slowly introduce him to Niki, Ranboo, and Jack. After, we’ll work slower. We’ll gain his trust, and it will take time. But we’ll get there eventually.”

At night, when he dreams, Dream remembers a younger brother and sister. He remembers a life before.

When he wakes up, he is met with a silent reality of the false of his past and the life he will never get back.

One day, he wonders how it is to love and feel. How it is to have people around you, who aren’t trying to tear you down for their own advantage. He wonders if a reality like so exists. If he is loveable if he will ever have a family of his own.

He meets George and feels something again. He meets Sapnap and finally understands what friendship means.

Brotherhood comes, when he meets Theseus. He is a shorter brown-haired kid with eyes like his own. He has wide dreams and a determination like no other.

“Little brother,” Dream tells him, the day his heart soars and he feels complete – because Theseus is his brother and he will admit it. “Theseus.”

Theseus shoves his arm off him and scowls. Dream notices the small lingering smile, after.

They grow together. Theseus may not know Dream’s whole life, but Dream witnesses his. He watches the boy grow and learn and compete. He watches the blood stain his skin and his eyes lose the glow they once held.

Dream admits to no one, but Theseus can make him feel angry, sad, and destroyed all at once. He gets furious when he realizes that Theseus will be trapped here forever and destroys his inside when he knows one of them will have to watch the other die, one day. Whether during a mission, or lack of cooperation between classes.

One day, he figures out that it is himself, who will kill Theseus and watch as the boy dies, right in front of his eyes.

So, they flee and live.

They make a promise.

Dream will not leave him. He will not leave him, as his previous family did. He will make sure Theseus lives because he deserves to. They will live together; they will destroy anyone who attempts to stop them. He refuses to let anything happen to him – and in the process, he must promise the younger boy, that he will stick around too.

Together, they will survive.

It is later, when Dream breaks the promise, they hold.

A promise to survive, they once say. A promise together.

Dream prepares to die.

Chapter End Notes

tldr; wilbur is jealous lmao

hey guys :)) this chapter was a bit of a wait cause of school but i hope it was worth it.
tell me what you think, would love to hear your thoughts :))

also i got tumblr to interact with the community more but it's confusing me, so i might make a twitter account? that way, you guys can get updates and get chapter sneak peeks. would this sound cool??

Unstoppable

Chapter Summary

“You wouldn’t lie,” Sapnap then says. “When did you find out?”

“A couple of nights ago,” Dream says. “I had to be sure.”

“And I’m the only one who knows?”

“Yeah.”

“Well fucking shit.”

They stand by the edge of the building, where a concrete barrier stops them from their death. The sight of death is not daunting when they’ve witnessed it countless times before.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He is Fourteen.

He is strong and smart and throws his punches before his opponent can even think of their next move. Because they aren’t his siblings, they aren’t his brothers – they are opponents and Fourteen will survive. He refuses any other option and does not hesitate when he swings his fist and lifts his leg to deliver a kick to their stomach.

They stumble and Fourteen does not.

Fourteen lives longer. He tears into his class and does not hold back.

Fourteen graduates. He is a Graduate.

He is praised for his determination and skill. The Headmaster sees something in him, and his Teachers will use him as a demonstration of the best.

He is careful and emotionless. He does not care, nor does he feel because he is an assassin, and he is trained to be the best. He eats meals alone and sits away from the other Graduates who watch him with jealousy and envy. They are resentful because they were trained to be what he is and fall, instead.

He fights with his head. He fights with his mind; he thinks and acts in a matter of moments.

Then he meets a boy called George, and then another called Sapnap.

“Dream,” Sapnap calls him, and it sticks. “Teach me how to fight.”

Sapnap calls him Dream, and that is his nickname now. George catches on fast because he is George.

“You know how to fight,” Dream wipes his forehead from sweat.

“I want to get better,” Sapnap tells him. “I’m the youngest Graduate, I’m the least experienced.” Sapnap has recently graduated, he is young. Sapnap is only sixteen.

“You don’t need to get better,” George rolls his eyes, stretching on the floor. He pulls his arms over his head and pushes his head to the side. “You’re good enough.” And he’s not wrong because Sapnap is far better than the majority of the Graduates, he’s their third – he only lacks in experience.

“You only say that because I’ll get better than you,” Sapnap smirks.

George rolls his eyes; he doesn’t pick a fight because he doesn’t care. Sapnap riles him on, and George stays silent. Dream pulls them in line.

The Graduates. *The Dream Team*, they are called on missions because they do not fail. That name doesn’t stick, though.

“I’ll teach you,” Dream reassures him. “Later. You don’t need much teaching though.”

“Hear that, Gogs?” Sapnap smirks. “I’m better than you.”

George sighs. “He didn’t say that.”

“Say it again Dream. He’s going deaf.”

Later, Dream teaches him new techniques for hours, and Sapnap watches. They spar until they bruise and are tired. Sapnap watches carefully and doesn’t open his mouth to speak a snarky comment as he usually does. Instead, he watches each movement carefully and his mind turns because they are assassins when they train and fight and go on missions. Together, they are Dream and Sapnap.

When Dream finishes, Sapnap says. “George is right.”

“What?” Dream asks.

Sapnap clicks his tongue and thinks. “You fight with your head, not your heart.” Dream thinks of his words and can’t stop thinking about them.

Of course, he fights with his head – which is what he tells George. “What did you mean?”

“I told Sapnap not to tell you, because then you’d overanalyze it,” George frowns. “It’s nothing.”

“It isn’t *nothing*,”

“Dream,” George sighs and rolls his eyes. “You’re ridiculous.”

Dream grabs his arm and pulls him forward. George turns and punches him in the shoulder, and they dodge each other’s blows until one of them stops.

George does. Dream grins tasteless. “There. What’s wrong with that?”

“You fight with your head,” George explains. “Your eyes are assessing and estimating. You, yourself is never in a match because it’s your mind is working. Sapnap fights with his heart, he fights with what he has. I’d say I do both – although I’m not any better than you.”

“So?” Dream asks for advice, which he doesn’t ask for, usually, because he is the best and the best do not ask from anyone lower. “What do I do?”

“I don’t know.”

Dream frowns and the conversation ends.

Theseus is when Dream realizes what Sappnap, and George speak about.

Theseus fights with his head, and his heart. He analyzes and fights with a passion, and a burning spitfire to reign above his peers; to live. There is a fire within his soul that cogs through his brain, which together creates thunder.

Theseus doesn’t know, but he makes Dream a better fighter. He makes him better than who he is before.

Others may argue that Dream becomes worse. Because Theseus becomes a connection and an attachment in Dream’s life, who he becomes fond of – who he cares for.

It is a while until Dream learns to fight with his heart too. Then, he is unstoppable.

Dream’s knives edge into walls and tear the targets apart. He has a fury instead of him, that he unleashes in the training rooms; one that he struggles to control at times.

A few times, he allows hell to release. Now, he goes easy. Dream’s capable of many things, he had to hold himself from punching a hole into the apartment wall when he found out about Tommy’s other scars. He’s capable of a lot more.

Sappnap is here to stop him. He enters the training room and snatches the weapons off him, to toss to the side. “That’s enough.”

Dream glares.

“You’ve been in here for hours. Meditate or sleep – or something else. This is fucking unhealthy.”

Dream laughs dryly. “You’re the one to speak.”

“And I’m getting better,” Sappnap grits. “Get out of the room, Dream. Breathe, for a second.”

Dream leaves the training room because Sappnap won’t. He leans on the wall outside of the room, his fists curled, and his mind is buzzing. He can’t fight with his mind when his heart burns.

Sappnap pulls him away. “Unhealthy,” he says again. “You tell me that you want Tommy to live a normal life, but you still stick to your old habits.”

“That’s not true.”

“You’re in denial,” They reach their room and Sarnap throws him an apple. “You’ve told me, that you want him to be a normal kid – and he’s trying. He found that friend, called – what was his name? Wilbur? And others. He got a job at some point and he’s doing better. But you’ve refused to change, Dream.”

“That isn’t true,” But Sarnap is right because he is in denial.

“Yeah, you got a job – but for *Quackity*? That was a step in the wrong direction. You haven’t made another friend, nor don’t you leave *Las Nevadas*.”

“It’s not safe if we do.”

“Okay?” Sarnap frowns. “What about before? Tell me, Dream, before I came – how did you spend your days, or shall, I guess? You woke up and drove Tommy to work, and then stayed in your office until night.” Sarnap pauses. “You’ve killed for him, too.”

“I haven’t killed for him,” Dream spits.

“It’s funny,” Sarnap laughs. “You think that I don’t know you. But I do.”

Dream hasn’t told anyone. Only Quackity knows.

Sarnap sees the glare in his eye. “I found out myself – it’s wasn’t hard to, when Tommy was telling me about how you got him a bodyguard, and that Quackity always expects something in return. I’m guessing you didn’t hesitate – when he offered Tommy protection, for you to kill.”

“You don’t understand,”

“What do I not understand?” Sarnap pulls out his arms. “I think I understand well, Dream. We were all assassins once; I would understand killing for protection – to save the people you love.”

“I didn’t want to take any chances,” Dream growls.

“I understand,” Sarnap says. “But you’re allowed to change. You don’t have to fucking kill anymore, Dream, that isn’t the only option. We don’t have to kill to survive – we don’t.”

“I needed to keep him safe, Sarnap,” Dream is tired. “He has to be safe.”

“He’s safer there, than he was here,” Sarnap crosses his arms over his chest. “He has Phil and his army of assassins. Phil won’t let him leave unless we say so – both of us know Tommy’s attracted to hazard, he would have figured out a way to put himself in danger, somehow. It’s practically his middle name.”

The two brothers smile.

“Tommy deserves to be a normal kid, more than anything. But that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve a life too, Dream. You don’t have to keep worrying about him, worry about yourself for once for fucks sake.”

Tommy is Dream’s responsibility.

“Tommy is your responsibility,” Sarnap reads his mind and rolls his eyes. “You don’t have to tell me – I know. But take a breather, and fucking live a little.”

“I don’t think I can,” his words have another meaning. “I don’t know if Tommy is safe if he isn’t here.”

“What did I say?” Sapnap leads him out of the room. “Phil’s got this. I don’t trust him either, but his agency is reliable.”

They step into the elevator.

Dream sighs.

“Philza is Tommy’s father.”

Dream hears the sound of the elevator, as they pass floors. Then he hears Sapnap.

“What!?”

“The folder,” Dream explains briefly, as Sapnap’s face morphs and he grips the metal bar beside him, processing Dream’s words. “It makes sense when I put it together.”

“They have the same name,” Sapnap spits. “So what?”

“They have the same eyes,” Dream says. “They lost a kid when they were younger. His name was Theseus.”

“How the fuck did you find this out?”

“I did a little digging. I had to be sure.”

Sapnap laughs loudly. They reach the highest level and stumble onto the roof of the building. Sapnap stands still, processing, and Dream stands to watch his facial expression.

“You wouldn’t lie,” Sapnap then says. “When did you find out?”

“A couple of nights ago,” Dream says. “I had to be sure.”

“And I’m the only one who knows?”

“Yeah.”

“Well fucking shit.”

They stand by the edge of the building, where a concrete barrier stops them from their death. The sight of death is not daunting when they’ve witnessed it countless times before.

“Do you think Phil knows?” Sapnap stares into the distance.

“Of course, he fucking knows, Sapnap,” Dream rolls his eyes. “He was introduced to Tommy as Theseus.” They pause and feel the wind. Then Sapnap speaks.

“Wilbur and Techno are his brothers,”

And the realization settles deep, that they aren’t.

“I should have noticed before,” Dream pulls his growing hair back. Wilbur seems similar to Tommy, and he’s connecting the dots too late. “I should have figured it out.”

“Well, we know now,” Sapnap shrugs. “Look, we can trust Phil more now – we know he’ll keep the kid safe.”

They aren’t entirely sure, though. Philza is a parent, and they don’t have good experiences with

older people. They especially can't trust how he will treat Tommy. Or if Tommy will comply – because Phil will remind him of his Teachers or the Headmaster. All older people do, adjustment takes time.

“What if Phil doesn't trust Theseus with us?” Dream questions. “He knows that when the assignment is over – that we'll want him back. He'll refuse,”

“He will,” Sapnap says.

Dream then says what they both think. “What if Tommy wants to stay with him?”

Dream is pledged to give Tommy a life he never got. Now, Tommy can have a family.

Tommy can live normally. Tommy can live a life that Dream and Sapnap couldn't.

“Then we'll let him stay,” Sapnap then says. “Because it's his choice.”

“It's his choice,” Dream agrees because his younger brother deserves that, at least. If he wants to stay, he will stay. And although Dream hopes Tommy will want to come back to them, he also wants him happy.

“Little brother,” Dream teases.

Theseus scowls. “Why do you do that?”

Dream pulls his hands through the boy's brown hair, and Theseus moves away. “You're my brother, Theseus.”

Theseus scowls and turns away, but Dream won't not notice his smile.

“Sapnap” Theseus calls for him down the hallway. “Tell Dream to stop harassing me.”

Sapnap jogs up to them. “What did he do this time?”

Dream rolls his eyes, Theseus speaks, “Tell him to stop,”

“Stop what?” Sapnap raises an eyebrow.

“Yes, stop what?” Dream smirks and turns to him. “Stop what, little brother?” he asks in Arabic quietly.

Theseus groans and turns away.

Tommy digs his fingers into his skin as Philza stares around his room. Holes are marked on every edge, from where his knife had pierced through not long ago. There is a pattern of holes on the roof that Tommy stares at, as he stays awake at night. Philza does not appreciate them as he does, as he frowns.

Tommy wonders what his punishment will be. If he'll be locked in his room or made to run laps until his legs turn stiff. He yearns to do something interesting with his time, so he hopes the option will be the latter.

Only Philza doesn't shout. He doesn't reprimand him or scowl. Instead, his lips press together, and he sighs. "Theseus," he says, his voice somewhat calm. "Give me them."

Tommy blinks. "What?"

"Give me your knives," He says, and Tommy almost flinches with expectation for something else.

"What?"

Philza sighs. "I can't trust you with knives in your room, Theseus. You might hurt yourself."

Tommy glares through his mask. "I've hurt before."

Phil flinches this time. "Just give them. I don't let Techno keep his swords in his room, either."

Tommy clings to his knives. He refuses to let go of them. "No, fuck off."

"Theseus," Philza sighs. "You can use them to train. Quackity won't be happy if he sees you bloody and bruised."

Quackity can eat shit, Tommy thinks. It's Dream he must worry about, but he'll end up shrugging it off. Actually, that's a lie, Tommy supposes. Dream will care. He does, now.

"They'll deal with it," Tommy snaps.

"They?" Phil pushes.

Tommy rolls his eyes and doesn't respond.

"Who's 'they', Theseus?" Philza repeats, and Tommy wishes he'd just *leave*. He forces Tommy to stay here, away from Dream and Sapnap, and now he's pestering him and taking away his knives. He'll take away his only form of protection because he knows Tommy can defend himself well.

"None of your fucking business," Tommy snaps and Techno enters his room as if the shouting is a personal invitation. They've left him in his room, and don't come in unless they knock. For some reason, they've forgotten the following unspoken rule.

"What's going on?" Techno questions, frowning at Tommy.

"The holes, Techno," Philza sighs. "I don't think Theseus should have his knives in his room."

“Phil,” Techno mutters, hoping Tommy can’t hear. But his hearing has always been better than average. He was raised in The Academy after all. “Maybe you should let him keep them – he needs to settle in.”

“I don’t need to settle in,” Tommy glares. “The mission will be over soon.”

“Mate, about that,” Phil says. “There’s been a delay. Quackity’s coming over to discuss it.”

“What?” He blinks, but he hears Phil – the information has caught him off guard.

“We’ll discuss it in a couple of hours,” Philza tests his words slowly. “Quackity and a couple of his agents will be here. You can join the meeting. Until then, though, I would appreciate it if you could hand me your weapons, Theseus.”

Tommy glares. Techno watches him carefully.

“Fine,” Tommy spits and flickers his knives from his pockets. He misses the cold metal against his skin when he tosses the one to Phil. Techno’s arm darts forward, catching it midair before Phil can. He smirks in Tommy’s direction and hands it to the man.

“You have more,” And he does.

“Take them,” Tommy’s face turns passive, and he sits on his bed, crossing his legs. His shoulders are hunched, and he expects the unexpected. “You’re going to anyway.”

“I won’t search if you don’t want me to, mate.”

He does. Well, Techno does. He looks through his bare wardrobes and under his mattress. They find three there, and another two in his dresser.

Techno reaches under his pillow. Tommy tenses and pulls his arm out to hit Techno’s arm away. But he falters at the almost-contact and speaks instead. “Don’t,”

“Theseus,” Techno rolls his eyes.

“Let me keep that one.” He needs one under his pillow. He needs to be safe. Tommy does not go to sleep, but if the knife is taken away, exhaustion won’t be able to consume him – there is no way he will fall into unconsciousness.

As an assassin, they are told to expect death in their sleep. They are to expect death at any hour, any minute of any day. When they are sleeping, they are the most vulnerable – one of Tommy’s deepest fears is not having the ability to protect himself.

“Phil?” Techno asks but they both know Phil wants to remove the knives because he doesn’t want Tommy to damage the walls of the expensive agency.

Phil reassures as Techno strips the last string of hope he has, otherwise. “I want to make sure you’re safe.”

Tommy doesn’t believe him. He stays seated, frowning, and pinching into his skin with his nails. It leaves red marks but does not hurt.

“XD will be here,” Philza then says, before the two leave the room. “I wanted you to know, in case you wanted to meet him again.” Tommy sees the tone under his words – Philza knows something. He waits as if Tommy will confess that XD is family, but he won’t. He simply stares blankly at

them, until they make their departure.

Outside, he hears them speak.

“Was it necessary?” He hears Techno ask. “He’s still struggling to settle in.”

“I’m worried he’ll hurt himself, Tech,” Philza responds quietly. “I didn’t want to take any chances.”

“If he doesn’t talk to you for the rest of the week, don’t blame me.” And they leave Tommy alone again.

He falls back on his bed and stretches his arms out. Tommy is tired. He hasn’t rested in days, and he starts to feel it now. They used to have lessons, where they had to stay awake for hours in order to survive. He excels, and the training pays off.

But Tommy’s tired. He’s so fucking tired.

He pulls off the mask and cards his fingers through his hair. He’s hungry too. His stomach rumbles and he cannot remember the last time he has eaten. He can’t fall asleep though – there is nothing to protect him, no weapon, no nothing. He is vulnerable, he won’t admit it – but he’s slightly frightened.

Instead of laying in bed, Tommy goes to find Tubbo again. He doesn’t forget his mask, but his fingers twitch for a weapon. He remembers the way there, by the elevator and down the hall. He knocks on the metal door because he does not have a key card.

There is no response though, and Tommy exhales, tipping his head back. “Tubbo!” He shouts.

“Theseus?” A voice calls back. “Give me one second!”

The doors fly open then, and Tommy quickly steps back.

“I was about to head out,” Tubbo jokes, rubbing his eyes. “Get in, I’ll get you a keycard later.”

Tommy steps inside, more guarded this time because of a lack of weapons. He knows Tubbo won’t try anything – his fatigue will throw him off, but Tubbo seems tired too.

“I got barely any sleep, dude,” Tubbo yawns. “Sorry if I admitted anything, I shouldn’t have. Wilbur’s always demanded questions so–”

“It’s fine,” Tommy says and stares at the arcade game, in the corner of the room. “Can I use that?”

“Go ahead,” Tubbo falls on a beanbag and takes out his phone. “Ranboo’s coming around later if that’s fine with you.”

Tommy nods his head silently and moves towards the arcade game. It’s simple, he has a small character and must pass levels and collect coins for upgrades. Tommy’s fingers engrave into the controller, and his eyes stick to the screen. He could stand there for hours, but he passes around twenty-six levels until Tubbo’s friend arrives.

Tommy remembers Ranboo well. He is a trained assassin and arrived at The Red Banquet with Philza and Technoblade. Tommy’s guard goes up because unlike Tubbo, Ranboo is trained.

“Hey, Tubbo–” Ranboo greets until his eyes meet Tommy’s blue. “Theseus?”

“He’s hanging out here,” Tubbo explains. “Don’t you have a meeting, now?”

“In an hour,” Ranboo says, his eyes still on Tommy, who can feel them engrave into his back as he continues the video game. “Uhh–”

“Theseus is harmless, he’s pretty cool,” Tubbo introduces.

“Phil wanted me to find him actually – he says you haven’t eaten?”

Tommy mutters under his breath, “Fuck Philza,” and continues his game. Tubbo snorts and shuffles in his seat.

“What happened?”

“Took away my knives,” Tommy explains, gruffly.

Tubbo laughs. “I have a couple,”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo hisses. “I don’t think you should–”

Tommy turns and stares at Tubbo. “Where are they?”

Tubbo grins and stands. “Can you give me pointers? I’m working on throwing, and I’m complete shit.”

“He’s hopeless,” Ranboo explains. “I don’t want my eyes removed, so I’m leaving.”

“Stay,” Tubbo pleads as he retrieves the weapons. “Until the meeting. C’mon, Boo.”

Ranboo doesn’t take long convincing. “Fine.”

Tubbo takes out a set of knives, and they move toward a barer space in the room. Tubbo pulls targets onto the walls and stands a distance away. Tommy watches closely, and Ranboo seems seconds from taking them off Tubbo. In all honestly, Tubbo doesn’t do horribly. They miss the point, but not by a lot.

Ranboo goes next. His black straightens, and he watches Tommy from the corner of his eye. He throws.

Tommy’s eyebrow raises as they dig closer than Tubbo had. Not bullseye.

“Your turn,” Tubbo offers and hands him a knife. Ranboo seems nervous as he does, he doesn’t trust Tommy. The assassin doesn’t blame him.

Tommy does not have to look when landing the knives at the target. One after another, Tubbo seems impressed afterward. “Teach me, Theseus. You have to.”

“Sure,” Tommy shrugs. “Ranboo?”

The boy seems hesitant. Tommy scopes him up and down and wonders how they let an apprehensive and anxious person become one. Not that he does not have anything against them – but the uneasiness was forced out of them through training when they were ten.

“Sure,” Ranboo then shrugs, with a sigh.

Tommy hands them weapons each. He directs their arms and corrects their stance. “It takes time,”

he explains. "To properly get used to it."

"How long did it take you?" Tubbo questions, curious.

Tommy deadpans, "A month."

"A month?!" Because that's far too short of a time for perfect technique.

Tommy nods his head. "We had to, to survive."

"That's concerning," Ranboo laughs, uneasily. "But you did grow up in The Academy—" Tubbo knocks him with his shoulder. "Ouch! What was that for?!"

"Phil said we're not meant to mention that," Tubbo whispers not so discretely and Tommy scoffs.

"It's fine," Tommy states. "I don't care."

"When did you learn to use a gun?" Tubbo jumps into questioning, even though he was the one who told Ranboo against it. "Or – fight?"

"Young," Tommy notes. "I don't know."

He learns to use a gun at ten-and-a-half. He learns combat in his first week at The Academy. They pull out the children who do not have talent – who cannot learn and replace them until their starting class is complete.

They end up discarding the targets and rest on the beanbags as Tubbo says his story at the Syndicate while Tommy reveals pieces of information about The Academy. Nothing can be used against him, though, because Tommy has a feeling Ranboo and Tubbo may tell others. Tubbo informs Wilbur of his secrets sleep-deprived, it's clear he's sleepy often.

"You do look like shit, Theseus," Tubbo says and Tommy glares playfully. "Hey, I'm allowed to say that because so do I."

"How much sleep have you gotten?" Ranboo asks hesitantly.

"None,"

"What?" They falter.

"I'm used to it," Tommy shakes his head. "The fatigue will hit in another day or so."

"You should sleep," Tubbo furrows his eyebrows and seems genuinely concerned. "Why don't you?"

Tommy stays silent.

"Is it the room? Do you not like it?" Ranboo furthers.

"The room is fine."

How does Tommy explain that he has nightmares of the previous people he has killed, and their faces keep him awake? How does he explain that Dream is the only person who can make them go away?

And how does he explain he needs to sleep with a knife? How does Tommy explain anything at

all?

“You should tell Phil,” Tubbo suggests. “You should get sleep.”

“I don’t fucking trust him,” Tommy says and that’s all, as he stands. “Isn’t there a meeting, now? Should we go?”

“What’s the time?” Ranboo asks Tubbo who has a phone.

“Four,” Tubbo and Tommy state at the same time. Ranboo and Tubbo snap their heads at Tommy, who does not hold a phone nor own a watch. “How did you know that....?”

Tommy smirks. “Counted.”

“How?” Ranboo questions incredulously.

Tommy stays ominous, not explaining how a good skill was to be able to count and track time in his mind, due to missions and lack of access to technology at times. Dream forces him to learn, and asks him for the time in the hallway, between classes until he develops the skill completely.

He doesn’t say any of that though. He simply turns around and walks to the door, while Ranboo is on his heel. Tubbo stays behind, telling them to update him if anything interesting happens.

“Quackity will be here,” Ranboo tells them, or maybe speaks to himself – Tommy doesn’t know. “It’s bound to be interesting.”

They walk to the elevator, and Tommy leans to the side, keeping a distance from Ranboo. “How are you so fucking tall?”

“Genetics?” Ranboo says, but it’s more of a question. He doesn’t meet Tommy’s eyes, and Tommy realizes that he hasn’t been able to, through any of their conversations. It can be taken as a sign of guilt for something – or well, a disliking for eye contact. Tommy assumes the latter for now. He still doesn’t understand Ranboo well. Knowing Tubbo as Tommy has helped him warm up to him better as Theseus, but Ranboo is a new boat on a fresh sea. He’s unpredictable and Tommy doesn’t know much about him still.

The elevator ride is slow, and Tommy hears voices from inside Philza’s office. He rushes through, swiftly dodging through corridors to follow the noise. Ranboo strides beside him until they burst through his doors to come eye-to-eye with Quackity, Antfrost, Dream, and Sapnap. As well as Philza, Wilbur, and Techno who stand to the side, assessing the agents.

Tommy’s eyes meet Dream’s and his shoulders unhunch for a second. He does not show emotion and stays stoic because there are others with him.

“Theseus, Ranboo,” Philza greets. “Just on time.” Ranboo walks over to Techno and stands by them. Tommy hesitates, before moving towards Dream and Sapnap.

“Theseus,” Sapnap says in Greek. They do not show emotion, they are all stone-faced and their words are of ice. “They haven’t hurt you, have they?”

“No,” Tommy’s eyes flicker to Phil’s, who watches them. “But he took away my knives.”

“What?” Dream swaps to Italian.

“He took them and said I will hurt myself,” Tommy’s accent thickens, and his words become

faster.

Sapnap almost grins. Dream rolls his eyes.

“XD?” Phil starts, coughing lightly. “We should start.”

Tommy glares. He sits between Dream and Sapnap, on the opposite side of the table from Philza, and his sons. Wilbur’s eyes do not leave Tommy, and the boy notices how Techno’s eyes do not leave his brothers’.

“I’ve kept him safe, as promised,” Philza starts by saying. “Although you did believe otherwise, Quackity.”

“I will believe whatever I want to believe in,” Quackity grumbles, and Tommy notices his new wear and a sly grin. He assumes that the man has something up his sleeve – something to say and reveal. “I assume by the way you treat your previous employers – that the instances would be the say.”

“He isn’t an employee,” Techno frowns.

“Did they treat you good?” Sapnap mutters beside him, in French.

Tommy nods his head lightly. “They’re dicks though. When can I go back?”

“Not for a while,” Sapnap says. “Quackity has found out that his next shipment for weapons won’t arrive until a couple of weeks.”

“Weeks?” Tommy groans and quietens as the conversation in front of him becomes louder. Dream listens to both, closely. “I can’t stay here.”

“Why not?” Dream furrows his eyebrows. “I thought you said that they treated you fine.”

“I can’t go to sleep,” Tommy sighs and continues in French. “They took away my knives, I told you.”

“You look skinnier,” Sapnap picks up his wrist. “Have you been eating?”

“No,” Tommy denies and Dream frowns. “Well, I’m fucking sorry, I haven’t been able to stomach the food.”

“Is everything okay?” Wilbur leans forward, both Tommy’s brothers snapping their heads at him. Wilbur leans back, laughing uneasily. “Uh, okay,”

“I’ll speak to Theseus outside,” Dream stands, and Tommy’s mind groans. “Won’t take too long.”

“XD,” Philza interrupts. “We do have important matters to discuss—”

“I won’t take up much of your time,” Dream promises and holds back from saying more than he should. He watches Tommy, who stays seated. “Theseus.”

Tommy frowns and follows him out of the door. They stand in the hallway, as Dream scolds him.

“You need energy, Toms. I know you’re training all day – you know like the rest of us, how a lack of nutrients can affect your fighting. You’ll collapse.”

“I don’t need you to tell me, Dream, I know.”

“Well apparently you don’t,” Dream snaps. “Tommy, you have to adjust.”

“Stop fucking saying that!” Tommy shouts. “Adjust to what? I won’t be here for long!”

Dream holds back. He has words on his tongue that he swallows. “I want you to be the safest you can, Tommy. You know this.”

“Then let me go back,” Tommy yearns. “I’m unsafe here. Philza’s fucking weird and you’ve seen Techno. They’re capable.”

“Trust me,” Dream grabs his hand. “You trust me, don’t you?”

“Well, yeah.”

“You trust me,” Dream repeats. “So trust me enough, to know that it will be okay.”

Tommy doesn’t know if he can do that. He nods anyway.

“I want you to eat and sleep well. I’ll tell Philza you need a knife with you if you explained that to him – I assume he would understand.”

“If he knows,” Tommy mumbles. “He could use that against me.”

“And if he does, we’re here,” Dream grabs Tommy’s palm, and spreads it out to place a phone in his hand. “It’s untraceable, so you can contact us in case of anything.”

Tommy stares at it. “Really?”

“Every night,” Dream promises. “I know how much you miss Sapnap.”

And I miss you, but Tommy doesn’t say that. He does not admit his vulnerabilities aloud to Philza because he doesn’t trust him. He is not vulnerable to Dream because he’s scared to.

“Okay,” Tommy says, and grips onto the phone between his fingers. “They might take it away, too.”

“I’ll make sure they won’t,” Dream pulls Tommy’s mask off, and ruffles his hair. “How’s the mask?”

“Exhausting,” Because of the questions and how suffocating it is. “But it’s only for two more weeks, right?”

“Yeah,” Dream sighs. “Two weeks. There were a couple of other things Quackity is discussing with Phil, but the main reason we did come, was to see that you were doing well.”

Tommy’s cheeks tint and he pulls on the mask again. Dream laughs, lightly. “Show me your room, I don’t think they’ll mind if we leave for a bit.”

Tommy nods his head and leads the way.

“They are your family,” Dream holds his breath and almost says. “Philza is your father, and Techno and Wilbur are your real brothers.”

Dream does not admit it though. He is selfish and cruel and can’t hand Tommy over yet. Tommy has brothers and a father, and Dream still wants to keep that away from him.

He wants to express that he is still Tommy's brother - but can’t because it is untrue. Dream won’t lie, but he cannot admit the truth either. “I hope you still know that after you find out.”

“Little brother,” Dream says one day, and cannot say again.

Chapter End Notes

tldr; tommy misses his knives and dream goes through a crisis

also this chapter was hard to write but i hope it turned out well! it was kind of hard to write some scenes, because there was a way i wanted them to go but i couldn't picture them in my mind which was a bit annoying.

anyhow, love reading all comments. thanks for leaving them and for reading!! <33

Perfect

Chapter Summary

“Do you think,” Sapnap then says. “That everything will go to shit?”

Chapter Notes

don't usually write beginning notes but um hope you're prepared?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Philza watches him, with eyes of gold. “XD.”

Dream stares back, unresponsive and unmoving. Technoblade’s eyes edge into him and Wilbur watches his mask for too long.

“Philza,” Dream then says and stares.

They have all left, including Sapnap and Tommy. Dream is left alone with them.

“What is Theseus, to you?” Philza asks slowly.

Dream almost smirks. Because he knows what Theseus is to them.

Theseus – there will always be a part of Tommy that they never get. When Tommy reveals who he is, they will not know how to calm his nerves and help him with his nightmares. They will not understand his previous experiences and realize that Tommy will not be the same kid they once had.

(“I can’t tell them,” Tommy refuses. “They can’t know.”)

“He’s my brother,” Dream admits, and the room stays silent.

“Brother?” Wilbur echoes his words, and Dream finally witnesses a world collapse in front of his eyes. He sees sparks of jealousy and crumbling walls. He sees them realizing that their son has another family.

“We met when he was younger – ten or so,” Dream must hold back his smile. Because their reactions are so *fun* to see. “We are brothers.”

Wilbur chokes, Technoblade glares.

And Philza watches.

Then Dream asks, “Then what is he – to you?” He tips his head forward and encourages a response.

Philza does, “I think you know, mate.”

“Phil – what?” Techno interrupts. “He knows?”

“He knows,” Philza says. “He’s fast, I would expect nothing less.”

Technoblade then asks, his eyes edging into the trained assassin – “Does Theseus know?”

Dream shakes his head. “He does not.”

“Why not?” Wilbur glares. “I’m surprised you haven’t confessed to him, yet.”

“I’ll allow him to settle in, knowing that he has no connection to you. If he discovers the fact – he won’t want to stay.” Because they are told their families leave them at The Academy and don’t want them back.

(“Bullshit,” Dream says.)

“You want him to stay?” Philza darts an eyebrow upwards. “I’m surprised, XD.”

I am too, Dream wants to say back. “It’s his decision to make, not mine.”

Technoblade mutters words under his breath and Wilbur keeps his eyes on him, envy stirring within his pupils.

“Very well,” Philza says.

“I gave him a phone for communication,” Dream then explains. “He also – he also needs his knives with him when he sleeps. Or he won’t be getting sleep. He hasn’t been – for the whole week.”

“What?” Philza stammers.

“He needs them,” Dream repeats. “So don’t take them away.”

“What else – what else should we know?”

Dream shrugs. “Theseus has changed. He’s not the same person, he was before.”

Tommy does not speak or eat. He is only recently Tommy, yet so different from Theseus. Because Theseus is loud and bold. Theseus has a strictness to his name and will listen.

Tommy – he stays silent and refuses to acknowledge Dream’s presence. He stares blankly at walls and stares through Dream when he speaks. He is quiet and does not listen.

It is two weeks and three days when Dream has enough. “Tommy, you have to eat.”

Tommy does not. His eyes move to Dream and drop to the carpet again, wordlessly. Dream exhales

deeply.

“Tommy,” he repeats. “Theseus.”

Tommy is quiet.

“I’m going to start on dinner,” Dream says to him, even if Tommy will not respond. “We’ll be off tomorrow morning, so our next meal won’t be in a while. I need you to eat.” He paces to the kitchen, rubbing his eyes and rolling his shoulders back. Fatigue has settled into his soul, resulting from the countless hours awake, and making sure they are both safe. He drives for hours and rarely rests. Tommy does not either. He does not sleep and stares into space.

Dream doesn't know what to do.

For the first time, he’s utterly helpless.

He pulls out tinned tomatoes and boils pasta. He can save the remainder for later – and hopefully, there will not be much as Tommy will be eating. Their training ensures they do not need to eat for days, weeks upon end without feeling hunger. But tiredness will settle within the younger boy, and Dream needs him to be strong enough to fight.

Dream needs to do better. Dream is meant to be the best. He is meant to be in control.

He finishes the food. He seasons it and takes out two bowls. He divides portions, and grabs metal utensils, before joining Tommy back at the couch. Tommy sits still and does not move – as he has been doing for hours. Dream had tried to put the television on, but when he had returned to the room, Tommy had turned it off.

“Here,” Dream shoves a plate in his hold. “Eat.” He keeps the bowl out until Tommy has no choice to take it. But Dream doesn’t move, staying standing. “I’m not leaving until you do, Toms,”

“Dream,” Tommy speaks, his voice raspy and evident he has not been drinking water. “Fuck off.”

“There’s the Tommy we all love,” Dream deadpans. “Now eat,” He collapses on the seat next to him, and motions his fork to his mouth. “You know how to do that, do you? Take your fork and–”

“I know how to fucking eat,” Tommy gulps. “I just *can’t*,”

“Yes, you can,” Dream persists. “You’re not sick.”

“My stomach hurts,”

“For almost three weeks?” Dream has been nice – he’s given Tommy space and given him time to himself. Sapnap tells him before, that Tommy will need time to settle and adjust. He requires space, and for Dream to not push him. But Dream can’t watch as Tommy tears himself apart right in front of his eyes, he won’t allow it.

“Yeah,” Tommy sighs, quietly. “I’ll throw it up. I can’t.”

Dream presses his lips together and thinks. “Can you eat half of it, then? We’ll save the rest for breakfast.”

Tommy stares down at his plate, empty. Dream doesn’t need to hear him to know what his answer will be. He’s used to straightforward answers and shouting words by the younger boy, Dream guesses that he will have to adjust.

Lucky for Dream, he knows Tommy well.

They've known each other for years. Ever since Tommy was Theseus, and a recruit, when he'd call Dream *sir* and flinch when Dream called him *Theseus*.

Dream stands and Tommy slowly raises his head, panic settling within him. Dream sends him a reassuring smile and leaves the room to the kitchen. He opens one of the plastic bags and pulls the contents to find what he's looking for.

"Sorry Dream," Tommy says quickly when Dream returns. "I'm sorry, I—"

Dream throws something at him. He smiles when Tommy catches it with one hand, midair, without notice. He blinks and stares at his hands.

"Pudding?" Tommy questions, oddly.

"Chocolate," Dream adds. "Your favorite."

Tommy stares at the dessert oddly.

"You won't eat the pasta. That's fine," Dream sighs. "But eat the pudding, kid. You need to have strength."

"I don't deserve it."

Dream scoffs. "If you didn't, then I wouldn't give it to you. You can have another one if you want."

Tommy does not brighten; he does not smile. But he eats, and that's all Dream hopes for.

Sapnap laughs. "Dude, I wish I could have seen their faces!"

Dream sighs as Sapnap continues. "That's fucking funny, what did Wilbur say?"

"He didn't say anything, only stared."

"That's even better," Sapnap grins. "The fuckers really took away his knives."

Dream rolls his shoulders and leans back on the couch. "I don't blame them – there are a hundred holes in the walls."

"You gave him the phone, right?" Dream nods his head. "What do you think about Philza, anyway?"

Dream thinks. "He'll change him, he wants Tommy to be the same he was years ago. He won't undermine the experiences he went through, but he'll find a way to change him to who he once

was.”

“How?” Sapnap scoffs, because they both know the boy they left, and the boy they know now are two very different people. “How on Earth will they do that?”

“No clue,” Dream shrugs and leans back.

Sapnap frowns. “And you’re just going to let them?”

“No, I won’t. They’re going to find out he’s Tommy somehow – I’ll work from there.”

“You made sure that they know he can’t sleep without the knives under his pillow? And that if he doesn’t get enough sleep for about a week – he’ll be moody and will be asleep for three days straight? And that he wakes up at six every morning and can’t have big meals?”

Dream blinks at Sapnap. “Uh, sure,”

Sapnap exhales. “Okay just making sure.”

There is a lot about Tommy, Philza will need to understand. Like how Tommy needs a reminder to breathe during his panic or anxiety attacks, and how he’ll try and eat sweets and desserts for his meals and needs someone to tell him to eat decent food. Or how he’ll speak with fiery emotions when he’s angry but won’t mean them.

There is a lot about Tommy that no one knows besides Dream, Sapnap, and once George.

“We know too much about that damn kid,” Sapnap laughs, jokingly. Dream rolls his eyes and stares at the ceiling as Sapnap pulls his legs up on the coffee table and sighs loudly. They are captured within boredom. They would have training any other day, or meetings to discuss agents and training programs for recruits. Tommy would have been with them, and they would not be so bored. But he’s not, and they have nothing planned – so they sit in silence.

“Do you think,” Sapnap then says. “That everything will go to shit?”

“What?”

Sapnap sighs. “If Quackity goes against Philza’s plan – which he’s planning to do, then how will that affect us, if he finds out about Tommy’s identity beforehand? We could be underestimating Phil here – we don’t know what he’s capable of.”

“Quackity’s plan does concern me,” Because betraying an agency whose owner is the father of their younger – of *Tommy*, doesn’t seem so appealing anymore. Not convenient. “We’ll speak to him about it later.”

“I shouldn’t trust him so much,” Sapnap then mutters, and groans. “But I do.”

Dream smirks, “You trust the people you love.”

“Fuck off,” Sapnap shoves him and fails since he’s laying down and Dream doesn’t move. “I don’t know if I fuckin’ love him, but I’m not having this conversation with you.”

“Then who will you talk to?” Dream rolls his eyes. “Idiot.”

Sapnap complies and speaks. He doesn’t need much convincing. “I think I don’t know how to love; I think. Karl and Quackity are always doing things – always together. They smile too much. I don’t know if I can do that. Going to the park with them once a week is already enough for me.”

“You’re projecting introverted tendencies, Sapnap,”

“Shut up,” Sapnap grabs a cushion. “They’ll hate me soon anyway.”

“Why?” Dream asks and Sapnap stays silent. “Why, Sapnap?”

“Oh, no reason,” Sapnap hesitates. “When they, uh, when they want me to go out with them, but I can’t.”

Dream narrows his eyes. “That isn’t what you were going to say.”

“You’re fucking annoying.”

Dream shoves him. Sapnap shouts. He stands from his seat and watches the apartment carefully. “We need to tidy this place up, it’s a mess.”

“It’s fine,” Dream doesn’t want to move.

“No, get up,” Sapnap pokes his arm. “We need something to do anyway.” Sapnap is right because Dream’s legs and arms twitch, and he waits to complete a task. So Sapnap shoves him into the kitchen and makes him rearrange the cupboards because pots and pans fall out when they open the small drawers.

Sapnap grabs papers and junk from the spare room, they have shoved useless or unneeded crap in, that they couldn’t figure out a place to keep. He flickers through old novels and rolls his eyes at broken weapons.

“Don’t throw that out,” Dream then says, and takes a knife from him. “Tommy made me this.”

“And you threw it away?” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “Be a better brother,”

The words travel deep, like a knife to his heart. “Yeah,” he says, light.

They continue. Sapnap talks and they consider turning on music until both of them argue about music preferences. Dream prefers smoother tones of songs, while Sapnap enjoys fast-paced rap music. They can’t come to an agreement and stop.

Sapnap returns with piles of paper. “Where the fuck is this from?”

Dream turns from where he wipes the stove and tilts his head to the side. “Uh fuck, most of that shit is Quackity’s old paperwork I had to complete. Throw it away.”

“All of it?” Sapnap flickers through the thick piles of paper quickly. Dream nods his head, and Sapnap does. “I’ll burn this shit. I have a couple of extra lighters in my room.”

“I think you’ve lit enough things on fire, for one lifetime.” Dream jokes, but they still go silent and still. He hates how he tries and jokes, but they can’t.

Because it’s *George*, his mind says. It’s George and he’s meant to be here.

“It’s fine, Sapnap,” Dream nods his head. “Light it on fire. I don’t think Quackity will be happy if we fill up the bins, anyway.”

Sapnap nods his head. The room is still.

“You loved him,” Sapnap then declares and Dream splutters.

“*What?*”

“You loved him,” Sapnap repeats. “And now he’s gone – and I’d thought you’d cry more.”

Dream frowns.

“It’s just – George meant a lot to you,”

“I know,” Dream says. “He meant a lot to you too,”

“But you pretend it’s okay. I think I’ve cried it all out, now. You’ve barely reacted.”

Dream doesn’t tell anyone that he lays awake for hours every night, wondering of George and what their future could have been. Of the life he could have had, one together. His throat closes and he desperately wants him back – but George is gone and went down along with The Academy.

He wonders if he will ever have the opportunity to make a grave for George. But this time, the stone will be marked and the flower by him will not wilt. George deserved a life as much as they did – he deserved to live.

George deserved to survive.

Sapnap leaves to throw away the belongings, and Dream goes to his room. He stays awake and watches the stars grow cold, alone.

Dream, George’s voice echoes in his dreams. When we leave, watch the stars with me.

Everyone has their own story.

So does George.

He is Twenty-three.

He is smart and quick.

He survives.

He is Graduate Two.

He is George.

The thing about George – the thing that separates him from the others and differs him from his peers – is his mind. He remembers books and papers as they practice knives and fight. He crams his neck into thick textbooks, as his siblings spar.

They glance and send him strange looks. They wonder why he is different; why he is not like them. George has never been the strongest. But George is smart.

He watches as peers leave and do not return. He is calculated through his sparring, and as his opponents have their skill and strength over him – George has his mind. He connects the pieces through his brain and surveys the body language of his competitor to anticipate their every move.

George may not be the fastest. But he strives to be the smartest.

Until one day, they pull him apart.

They change him. They mend him into what they want him to be. What he isn't.

“Flawless.” He remembers their distant words. He forgets. “A perfect assassin,”

They pull him apart until he forgets who he once is. They make him what he isn't.

They strive for perfection – and George is not perfect.

“George?” Dream one day asks. “You zoned out.”

Brown meets green. “What?” George mumbles, tired.

“Don't zone out,” Dream mutters and pushes his shoulder. “Are you not sleeping well?”

“I'm sleeping fine.”

Dream stares into him. “Then what's going on?”

George cannot say. Dream pursues his lips, and nudges his shoulder, lightly. “You don’t want to be slacking, you know what happens if you do.”

George feels the blood inside of him run, and his ears ring. He feels different.

They continue testing, they don’t stop. They poke wires into his skin, and blood runs through his veins until he can’t feel them anymore.

“To be better,” they reassure him. “To be perfect.”

And one day, they finish.

The Headmaster comes in. They stare into George’s eyes and nod their head, proud. “We appreciate your cooperation, Graduate Two. Your efforts will not go unnoticed.” However, he is not perfect yet. It will take time, months they say, until George is what they want him to be. But the main part of the testing has finished. The sharp cuts and fresh bruises will settle.

However, a downside is that George grows more restless and tired. He no longer wakes at six and sleeps earlier. He struggles to stay awake throughout the day and must fight fatigue to continue.

One day, Dream shouts some sense into him. “What is wrong with you? You’ve made it this far, George!”

“I know,” George grows restless.

“You don’t!” Dream shouts. “You need to stay alive! If you continue where you are at – missing lessons and your classes, then you won’t. I thought you fucking understood this!”

“I do,” George does not fight anymore. He does not have the energy to.

Sometimes, George watches. He watches the world move and watches himself remain. The sun rises, and the stars scatter. The world moves, and he is left behind.

Months pass.

George is tired.

“You’re out of it,” Theseus says during a mission, glancing at him with curiosity. “Your eyes are glassy. You think all the time.”

“Theseus,” George tells the younger. “Be quiet for the second.”

Theseus stays quiet.

“And watch.”

The world works in mysterious ways. Stories pass between their eyes, and George watches. He enjoys noticing the small details and exploring aspects that no one else sees. One day, George won’t be so tired. He will be perfect, and they will use him for more missions. They make him perfect, so George will perform perfect.

“The perfect assassin,” They say. “We are glad you are with us.”

He is appreciated for once. He is not just number two – unvalued for his lack of skill and strength. One particular day, he sees his performance set between his bones. He spars Dream, and for once, Dream does not win fast. They remain fighting for a while, George gaining the upper advantage as

his arms have more push and his legs have embraced their hidden intensity. They end up laying on the mats, panting and looking for breaths.

“Have you been doing extra training?” Dream huffs for air and wipes sweat.

“No,” George coughs and stands. “Again?” Dream nods his head, and they spar. They are partners, and George isn’t so behind Dream. He is his own person – he isn’t only Graduate Two. He is George, and one day, he will be the perfect assassin. He will be what The Academy wants to be. He strives for it until he doesn’t.

One day, the sight of death seems appealing and he realizes that he does not want to continue. He refuses to become a mold and change himself for what they want of him. He refuses.

So, he plans.

“You and Theseus will leave,” he tells Dream. “Sapnap and I will stay.”

He waits.

“I’ll get the files,” he tells Sapnap. “You burn this place down.”

He watches.

“Soon, we’ll begin soon. Make sure Dream gets the message we’re arriving soon.”

George’s plan is flawless. He plants the idea of the files in Sapnap’s head, subtly, a while back. Before their escape, Sapnap mentions it again, and George plays into his act.

Sapnap will light The Academy on fire. He will burn the place to the ground.

George will burn along with it.

On the night of Sapnap’s escape, he whispers his name one last time. “*Sapnap*,”

And for the last time, Sapnap says his. “George,”

George takes out his hand. “If this doesn’t go well, it was a good ride.” He hopes Sapnap takes it.

Sapnap does, however he hugs him instead.

Then and there, George almost holds regret for what he is about to do.

“Don’t say that Gogy,” Sapnap murmurs.

“Don’t call me that.”

Brown eyes meet green. It is the last time they will ever see each other again.

(“Don’t wait up for me,” George makes Sapnap promise. “Do what you have to do and run.”

“I won’t leave you behind.” Sapnap persists. He does not start the fire yet, but his eyes burn.

George grips his shoulders, tightly. “If I can’t make it out alive, then you must.”)

George leaves Sapnap with the gasoline.

But George does not retrieve the files. He waits for a whisper in his ears.

He hears, “*I’m ready, George,*” Or perhaps, it is the wind.

But The Academy burns and George does not have the files.

(He finds them beforehand. Thick papers with information that spills black ink. He instructs Curtis to hide them at Dream’s location. He does not open the files himself. He does not want to know his life of before, the life he will never get again.)

Soon, The Academy falls. The flames surround him.

George burns.

He laughs one last time. He refuses to be the assassin they want of him. He refuses to belong to this place – he refuses a life he does not want. He refuses to be tied down between the wall and anticipate a life of murder and death. George wants freedom. He needs it.

He will not be what they want from him. George refuses.

He asks Sapnap how he thinks their first sunset feels.

He hopes Sapnap feels alive. He hopes that Sapnap feels free.

He hopes that one day, they can watch the sunset together.

(He also hopes that one day, he can watch the stars with Dream.)

When George is seconds away from death, he feels the most alive he has ever been.

Chapter End Notes

tldr; the book becomes the promised neverland (guess whos ray)

hey guys :) thanks for reading!

if you're wondering, there will be more tommy next chapter.
and george.

love reading comments, thanks for leaving them <3
(also will make a twitter account soon)

Checkmate

Chapter Summary

Stiff and cold, the handcuffs have never felt so heavy before.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George does not die.

Between life and death, he hesitates.

Four agents are selected, usually. Dream, Sapnap, George, and a high-performing Graduate. They are taken elsewhere for a week and compete against other agencies, and other assassins to see who will remain, who will survive.

Four survive, thirty-six do not.

A battle of dominance, Dream informs Theseus. They test each agency, to identify which agency is on top. There are eight challenges, that involve strength, deception, and mind, Dream explains. The Academy always wins.

They hold their title proudly. Because their agents are the best, their agents do not lose.

Theseus is fifteen when he is selected as their fourth.

He isn't officially their fourth – he won't be until he completes Graduation. But when he is told he selected – over any other Graduate, or another student to be with them, Theseus will say that him being pleased, is an understatement.

Dream lectures him when he is selected. “You'll complete training with us, now. Not for all your lessons – you can't skip languages with George. But we need to train you.”

Theseus will not let them down. He must prove something – to them, to himself.

And if he can't – then they're dead anyway.

Dream reassures him, though. “We haven't lost since we started competing, so don't worry about that.”

Dream starts the Contest when he is sixteen, so does George. Sapnap starts at seventeen. Theseus is the youngest competitor on behalf of The Academy – and the whole Contest.

They train. Theseus wakes early mornings tired and sleeps exhausted. Dream is relentless and he shouts and pushes, but at the end of a couple of months, Theseus feels as prepared as he can.

They wear pull on their red blazers, with black symbols. A capital 'A' to mark their presence, along with the school's logo. They wear white shirts, black shorts, white socks, and black shoes. The Headmaster stares at them before they leave, with eyes of whiteness and words that are black.

"Don't let me down."

"Yes, sir," they say, and leave. Taken by long, black cars, the three Graduates speak quietly among themselves, while Theseus stays still.

Sapnap nudges him. "You okay, kid?"

Theseus nods his head.

George watches him. "It'll be fine. The competition is easy."

Dream rolls his eyes and speaks to Theseus. "Don't freak out, or stress. There will be eyes on you since you're new. Ignore them."

Dream isn't wrong. When they first step into the large hall, with the thirty-six other competitors, their eyes scan Theseus, and he almost freezes. But he is a student of The Academy, and he must not show weakness. So, he guards himself, and keeps a black face, mirroring George's. Sapnap on the other hand, smiles at others, and waves at a few. Dream leads them to another group, where they are introduced to a few others.

"CPK," Dream greets. "An old rival," Dream tells Theseus later than they meet in a meeting between agencies a while ago.

CPK seems nervous. Theseus notices.

"Dream," CPK nods his head. Theseus is introduced to Shubble and Smajor. They are some of the highest students at Willow College. They all seem nervous.

Theseus voices his opinion at dinner, and Sapnap bursts out laughing. "Why do you think they're nervous, Theseus?"

Theseus shrugs his shoulders and shoves the cold yogurt in his mouth. They have a selection of foods to eat as they are here, and Theseus promises to make the most of it before they return to the same meals again. "Why?" he asks with a mouthful.

"Theseus," Dream rolls his eyes. "Don't eat with your mouth full."

"Don't eat with your mouth full," Theseus mocks his words.

"They're nervous," Sapnap then explains. "Because they won't survive."

Theseus blinks. He sees Dream's smirk and George's small smile. Then he hears Sapnap's laugh and understands.

It is to be feared, or fear.

Dream, Sapnap, and George are feared.

Other's fear.

Because it is life or death, and there is no in-between.

"Has Dream gone through the game plan with you?" Sapnap asks and Theseus rolls his eyes.

"Only fifty-eight times." He's counting.

"Not enough then," George smirks.

Sapnap tells him. "There will be an introduction meeting tomorrow when we'll meet our competitors and the adjudicators. Others watch on screens."

Theseus knows well. For five lessons every month, students are dismissed and watch the Contest from their respected classrooms. Theseus watches them – his brothers – compete, with aweing and hope to be as strong as they are one day.

Now they will watch them on the screens from the cameras littered around the screen.

"Our first game is tomorrow. We'll have one game every day and on the last, there will be the final as well." Sapnap continues to explain (although Theseus knows the premises well) that each game will test each individual aspect to truly determine how strong each selected agency is.

The games list from a range of obstacles and parkour, to fighting with and without weapons.

"The worst deaths," Sapnap lists from the top of his mind. "Probably from the battlegrounds. There's fire, I've seen people burn alive." The lucky individuals live with injuries and close-no-death situations. They return their institution with scars, and usually alone – as their companions have not made it out. They will not either soon, as losing can cause great humiliation for their school. If they do not win, they might as well die.

"Stop scaring him," George instructs at Sapnap. "It will be fine."

Theseus hopes it is.

That night, Theseus does not sleep. He stays away, watching the frame of the top bunk where Sapnap sleeps and hears George's light snores in the background.

Dream knows he isn't asleep. Dream might as well know everything.

"It will be fine," Dream may have to say his words a hundred times over, for Theseus to start believing him. "Trust us kid, we'll be fine."

They lay, lonely. Theseus turns his head to notice Dream lay on the bunk on the opposite of the room, his head resting in his palms. Theseus' eyes flicker to George, who sleeps soundly.

"I just don't want to let anyone down," Theseus says soft.

"And you won't," Dream says. "There hasn't been anyone competing at your age before. Trust."

"Trust," Theseus repeats but his stomach stirs.

The following morning is the welcoming meeting. Four agents from each agency line up in rows, and the camera pans to each, listing their names and strengths.

It gets to Dream. The audience claps, because they are expected to win – they have every previous year, after all. Dream's name is plastered on the large screen in front and his long row of strengths. Theseus is told by his brothers to keep his head straight, to not stare at anyone else when the cameras are on them. But Theseus peers over carefully to see the nervous reactions of the other agents.

When it is Theseus' turn, it is the first time his name is used. *Theseus*, the screen says. And lists his strengths including combat and quickness. The list is no longer than Dream, Sappnap's, and George's, but it's enough.

After they are listed, and the rest of the agents have their turn, there is clapping and a speaker announcing the beginning of the competition.

Soon, they change into black uniforms, and it is the last time they will see all forty of each other. By the end of the day, they will have reduced to a little more than thirty.

Theseus does not know what to expect as the competition continues. He zones out for the majority of it, letting Dream do his thing, and for George and Sappnap to play in a suite. He does not stand out, nor does he do much, as Dream is always on one side of him and Sappnap is on the other. He does not believe he continues much, but Sappnap always pats his shoulder after every round and Dream tells him of how well he has worked, over dinner.

Even George, says something nice.

They make it to the final round. No one is surprised.

"To death," George tells him, with warning. "Or injury. You catch weapons with your hands and throw them back."

Theseus knows he will do well.

"Stand back," Though Sappnap states. "We've done this plenty of times before."

Theseus nods his head. Theseus complies.

The final match begins, and Theseus notices opposite them, is the assassins they spoke to, on the first day. There is Smajor, CPK, Shubble, and another boy called Quig who is the youngest apart from Theseus. They must throw weapons at each other from the other side of the grounds, and fight until one team stands.

Theseus stands back and lets his brothers finish them off. Dream knows CPK – but is fear or to be feared, and Dream will not hold back. He sees Dream pull his arms wide and his body firmly in position as Sappnap throws knives from behind him, his stance strong. Then there is George, who seems quick and calculated as he aims his shots.

They are the assassins that The Academy must be, the Graduates that are admired.

Theseus understands now more than ever. Because up close, he notices Dream's concentration and Sappnap's strongness. Theseus sees George's calculation.

They are Dream, George, and Sappnap.

They are strong.

They are his brothers.

And Theseus hopes that one day, he can be like them. One day, he can stand strong with them and truly be their fourth.

“Dream,” Tommy says into his phone at night. “I can’t fuckin’ sleep.”

Dream’s voice is not groggy and tired, as he thinks it will be. He assumed Dream would have woken up to his phone ringing. Instead, he speaks gently and soft.

“Do you have a knife with you?”

Tommy laughs lightly. “Yeah. Phil gave me one.”

“Then why can’t you sleep?”

Tommy’s throat closes. “I can’t,”

“Why not, Tommy?”

He’s afraid to admit of the people that watch him in his dreams. People will bullet to their brains, and blood sweeping out of his eyes. The men, the women, and the children he has killed. The people he has killed, for his selfish survival.

“I can’t tell you,” Tommy whispers.

“That’s okay,” Dream doesn’t push, which is a relief. Philza pushes Tommy to take off his mask and Wilbur pushes him to leave his room. Techno won’t stop pushing him to speak.

“They’re weird,” Tommy then admits, placing his phone on the bed, as he sits on the floor and tips his head back. He dips his eyes closed, to receive darkness. “They act differently.”

“Different?”

“They act strange when I’m Tommy. When I’m Theseus, they’re stranger. I can’t explain it.”

“Are you overthinking it?”

“No,” Tommy denies. “I’m not.”

Dream stays silent. *“How’s Wilbur like?”*

“Why the fuck do you want to know?”

“How’s Wilbur like?” Dream repeats. *“Is he as worse as Sapnap? Tell me about him.”*

Tommy snorts and rolls his eyes. “When I’m Tommy, he’s a bit more bearable. He’s too invasive, but he hears me. But now, he’s a fucking dick.”

Dream snorts.

“He’s cornering me, pushing me. They tell me to take off my mask, I don’t know if I’ll be able to.”

“Your choice, Tommy,” Because he has choices now that they’ve left. *“Quackity and I will be around tomorrow. We’ll do a bit of training together if you want.”*

Tommy hates how desperate he feels. “Can Sapnap come?”

“Sapnap can come,” Dream confirms.

Tommy is about to ask about George. But at The Academy, he asked about Sapnap, and then George. George isn’t here anymore, though. So, the words die on the tip of his tongue, and he swallows the phrase before it leaves.

“How long?” Tommy then questions. “I don’t know how long I can stay.” It’s been longer than a week. He’s homesick, even though he isn’t sure what home is, at this point.

“I’m not sure, kid. It’ll be a while.”

“Can Quackity hurry the fuck up?” Tommy grits his teeth. “Can they hurry?”

“Trust,” Dream says softly, and waits for Tommy’s response. *“C’mon Tommy – trust,”*

“Trust,” Tommy sighs, reluctant.

“How about a story?” Dream then suggests as they sit in silence. *“To help you sleep,”*

“I’m not a child, I don’t need one.”

“A bedtime story,” Dream teases. *“Close your eyes.”*

“I’m not closing my eyes.” He closes his eyes.

“Hear me?” Dream asks but doesn’t give Tommy enough time to respond. He coughs lightly. *“There once was a God. His name was Theseus.”*

“Dream,”

“Shut up, kid,” Dream says. *“It’s the only story I know.”* Dream learns it one day, to tell Tommy.

(Dream learns of mythology to tell Theseus. He reads papers and chapters of thick books, to tell the boy.)

Tommy hates his name. He hates being Theseus because it isn’t who he is.

But he listens.

“Once, there was a God, and his name was Theseus,” Dream says and the story continues.

George feels the heat by his skin and the fire consume his mind.

The walls fall, the ceiling burns.

George sees a future life pass between his eyes.

A life with Dream, Sapnap, and Theseus. A life they can *live*.

But he refuses to let The Academy take him. He is trapped in a metal cage, and he knows that death is the key to the handcuffs that tie him to the cruel life he lives.

They keep him in his cage. They prod and poke him until he is who they want him to be. They experiment and test him, because he is not perfect, and they will not stop until he is. But he is not George anymore. George is gone, the longer he lives.

George knows he will die the day he kills his first man. The first-time blood stains his arms, and their white eyes flash through his skull, George plans his death.

Death comes.

He sees his family, in what he thinks is his last moment. He sees Dream, who promises a future with him. They plan to live together one day, to learn and to love. He sees Sapnap, who does not need to be blood to be his brother. Sapnap saves him, Sapnap is once a reason to live for.

George also sees Theseus. He hopes Theseus will persist. Because he is stronger than George ever will be.

One day, George tells Theseus that he has no will to live. That he does not care about death and will accept it when it comes.

George accepts.

George is free.

He feels ash and smoke.

He wakes up.

Stiff and cold, the handcuffs have never felt so heavy before.

“*George*,” they say his name as if he will forget. It is the last connection he has to his previous life, as they all do.

They poke wires into his skin, and George dips his eyes closed.

“Eyes open.” He opens his eyes.

The machines are heard behind him, and he feels his stomach stir. The needles and tubes are a normal occurrence now, they have been for months. This is normality to him because it must be. The researchers and testers, and the Headmasters rare occurrence. He pretends to be fine around Dream, Sapnap, and Theseus, but he is anything but.

“Testing is almost complete,” One day from another room. George’s hearing has improved over the last couple of months. He does not know if it is from the tests they’ve done, or from his concentration as the majority of the private conversations occur outside the white doors. He practices listening in until he can distinguish their voices from the deeps and whispers in the room, he lays in.

“When we’re finished, they’re bringing another in,” Another says. “He’s younger, less developed.”

“It will be more difficult,” they say, and George feels his eyes roll behind. He fixes his posture and leans backward. They speak of another subject for a while now, a couple of weeks. He assumes that once he is perfect, they will move to another student.

He is younger, they say. So, he doesn’t have to worry about Dream and Sapnap. Theseus won’t be chosen either, so his family is safe. Yet, he prays for the other person – that they will be fine.

George watches his family die. He watches his brothers shot and killed. He watches them die from starvation and thirst. Yet, he still hopes that the other person – the brother he will not know, will be okay.

George certainly isn't. Fatigue is a constant, he does not feel like himself anymore.

If he had the will to live like Theseus or a spark like Sapnap, then maybe he'd persist. Maybe he'd fight death.

But George plans his demise, steadily. George accepts death because George does not want to survive.

George awakes.

His hands curl, and he can't feel his arms. He licks the inside of his mouth and tastes blood. Wind brushes his skin, and life burns his soul. He blinks and feels ash between his eyelashes. Planks of wood lay beside him, and the ash of the school before him.

The Academy crumbles. The Academy falls.

George finally registers his soundings. There is grey and smoke, but between midst, he sees a sunset. The sun falls, and he does not taste the liberty he hopes for, once he escapes life.

Instead, he is met by cold reality. He is surrounded by loneliness, and his skin still *burns*.

George lifts his hands to his eyes and sees the cracks between his fingers. There are burns and bruises, but he is alive. George is *alive*.

"No," He chokes. "*No*."

He hopes for death, he begs for it.

Yet, he sits between the remains of his past and realizes death is not his future.

Why? His mind is numb. Because his plan is flawless and calculated. He plans this for months, for years in his mind.

Sapnap starts the fire. George burns along with The Academy.

His skin burns. The hair on his skin is gone and remains a tingling sensation that chokes him. It wraps around him and presses against his soul.

He doesn't understand.

He's meant to be fucking *dead*.

“Fuck.”

He can't possibly understand because life is not possible when he is so close to death. Not when he is an assassin and must not fail.

George thinks he wins. *Checkmate*, he says before he dies, to only become a pawn on the board.

He comes to the realization, hours later. The realization comes slow and steady but hits him fast.

George realizes that he was once tested on. He is prodded with wires until he is perfect.

And the perfect assassin must live.

George lives. George lives because he cannot die.

Chapter End Notes

hey hey :)

thanks for reading! was waiting to get this chapter out. it's shorter, but i'll make sure to make up for it in the next chapters

(my aphantasia did not help at all tho, especially during the george scenes rip)

also, dream made a fanfiction competition. i don't really care about any awards, but it sounds fun so i might write something extra idk

anyway, i love reading comments and they make my day! would love to hear what you guys thought <33

(EXTRA NOTE: i keep putting twitter off but twitter account soon)

Unloveable

Chapter Summary

Caged and handcuffed to life; he lives.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy sighs.

His fingers twitch and his mind buzzes. Tubbo sits on his left, speaking to Ranboo who is seated across the table. He feels Wilbur's eyes on him and Phil glance at him every so often. He hears Techno cut his chicken next to him, the metal knife cutting against the plate.

("You'll eat dinner with them," Dream tells him over the phone. "Philza doesn't want our phone calls to get tracked and doesn't want to take any chances. So, I made a deal with him, that if you eat dinners with them – he'll allow it.")

"Screw him."

"You're not eating," Dream says. "And as much as I disagree with Philza, you need to eat.")

Tommy does not eat. He stares at his plate, and gags at the sight of food. He had been doing better before, eating more than a few bites for each meal. But now, he can't even pick up the fork placed in front of him.

He feels eyes on him, and words flow through his ears. Tubbo taps his fingers on the table and someone coughs to his left.

Tommy didn't know there would be so many people here. When Philza says they'll eat dinner together – he thinks that he means his sons, and himself. He doesn't know that includes Tubbo, Ranboo, and quite a lot of his agents.

"Theseus," Tubbo's eyes are now on him. Great. "Do you like the food?" Tubbo would have noticed he hasn't touched his chicken or even looked at the vegetables.

"Uh," Tommy glances at his friend before his eyes flicker away. He can't do this. Not today. He stands abruptly, the chair skidding against the tile under his feet.

Some agent's eyes glance at him, and then away. Phil's, Wilbur's, and Techno's stay.

"You, okay?" Tubbo asks, his voice heightening. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Tommy feels his cheeks go red, but he remains composed. He gulps. "I'm going back—"

"Theseus," Philza says from the head of the table. Tommy almost flinches. "You shouldn't go to your room until you've finished." He says with authority like he has something over the boy.

Tommy leaves anyway.

He exits the dining room, the wooden spruce doors slamming behind him, as he navigates back to his room. His hands fumble for his phone, and he recites Dream's number, before throwing his mask on the floor.

He breathes. In and out. In and out.

Dream picks up.

"I don't know what's wrong," Tommy stutters quickly and grips his wrists. "I can't *breathe*,"

"*Take it slow*," Dream says calculated and slow. "*You can, Tommy. Slow.*"

Tommy's heart races, and he gulps for air as he slides to the floor and grips his fingers to the carpet. *Breathe*, he reminds himself, if only he could.

"*Remember our exercises*," Dream tells him, his voice distant to Tommy's ears. Panic is not irregular for Tommy, especially after missions. Dream was always there to calm him down, because if a Teacher caught him, or another student ratted him out, he would face consequences.

(To be strong, they are taught. To be perfect.)

"I need you," Tommy blurts out, and closes his eyes. "I need you, Dream."

He doesn't want to admit it because assassins do not need each other. They are independent and must be able to work alone.

But Tommy needs Dream. Now more than ever.

"*I'm sorry*," Dream exhales. "*That I can't be there.*"

Tommy is safer with Philza. He's safer and away from danger.

"*Breathe*," Dream says. "*You know how to do that.*" Dream tries to make him laugh.

"Fuck you," Tommy splutters with coughs. His heart pounds and he can feel the blood rush through him.

But eventually, the panic settles and he's left with a steady heart.

"*Can you tell me what happened?*" Dream questions. "*Usually this doesn't start unless you're having a nightmare,*"

"Does there have to be a fucking reason?" Tommy groans and pulls his blond curls back, his forehead covered with sweat.

"*Yes, there usually is*," Dream tells him. "*Tommy.*"

"I can't eat," He feels stupid that he's panicking over something so small, something so meaningless. At The Academy, he'd be killed for crying over such a useless reason. "I can't."

"*That's okay*," Dream says softly and careful. "*When was the last time, you did?*"

Tommy is afraid to admit it aloud. "A couple of days."

“Can you give me an exact amount?”

“Four days,” Tommy expects Dream to explode, mainly because when they first escaped, Dream was always up his ass about eating the correct foods and having a right nutrition. He’d pester him endlessly and wouldn’t let him train until he put something in his stomach.

Instead, Dream takes a deep breath in and out. It comes static through the phone speaker. *“Okay, that’s okay.”*

“I can’t,” Tommy’s fingers dig into his wrist. “I try to, and I feel nauseous. And Philza’s always around and I don’t have any *space*.”

Dream gives him space. He lets Tommy lock his door and gives him options and choices. He leaves the room when Tommy needs him to and won’t keep his eyes on the younger if he’s uncomfortable.

Philza is different. He is invasive and stares a lot. So are Wilbur and Techno, whose questions are endless, and they never stop asking him to take off his mask.

“I’m staying on the phone with you, and I’m coming over.”

“What?” Tommy’s eyes fly open.

“Fuck Philza, I’ll be there.”

Dream does not lie. Dream stays on the phone line with him, until he ends the call as he has to call Quackity. He promises to be there in a matter of minutes.

Tommy lays on his cold bed and closes his eyes. When he opens them, Dream towers over him with a vanilla pudding in his left hand.

He hands it in front of Tommy’s face, and with no hesitation, he states, “Eat.”

Tommy takes it from him. It isn’t the usual packaged brand Dream buys for him, but he rips it open anyway. Dream passes him a spoon and sits down on the bed by him. He doesn’t watch Tommy, though, instead, his eyes trail around the blank room as he analyses the walls and corners carefully.

Tommy’s stomach rumbles. He takes a bite, and Dream reminds him to eat slowly. He does until the packet is empty.

Dream tosses him a bottle of water. Three sips later, he tips his head back, exhausted.

“Sleep,” Dream instructs. “I’ll be here when you wake up,”

“Dream,” Tommy laughs, tired. “I haven’t slept for days.”

“I know,” he pushes him back and shuffles over. “But you’ve always slept better when I’m here.”

“Fuck you,”

“I locked the door,” Dream says. “Sleep.” And Tommy does.

Dream sighs.

He does not fail to notice how Tommy hesitates between bites or how his hands shake. When he sleeps, his face rests and he is the calmest Dream has seen him for a long time.

Dream takes out his phone and calls Sapnap.

“It was Tommy,” he admits straight away. “I’m at the Syndicate’s right now.”

“That explains it, I guess,” Sapnap responds. *“Quackity called me and told me that you left with no explanation.”*

“Does he want an apology?”

“No,”

“Good, I wasn’t going to give him one.”

Sapnap snorts. *“How’s the kid doing, then?”*

Dream won’t lie. He watches Tommy’s figure and takes a deep breath in. “I don’t know, Sapnap. He had a panic attack.”

“Really?” Sapnap does not ask in disbelief, but rather shock. *“What caused it?”*

“I think,” Dream pauses. “I think I know?”

“Well?”

Dream thinks. He knows Tommy appreciates space and room to himself, and he knows that Philza won’t give him that – because Tommy is his son, and he doesn’t want to lose him twice. And Tommy’s now in a situation with people with who he is uncomfortable and unfamiliar within this lighting – so the kid must be confused and anxious about the next steps.

This is what Dream tells Sapnap. They sit in silence until they both think the same thing: That Tommy needs to know that Philza is his father.

“It will be a step back,” Sapnap mutters. *“He won’t trust him; he’ll hate him for how his life has turned out.”* Tommy will forever hold resentment for Philza’s lack of care and for his actions of giving him away. When Tommy figures out – that they aren’t given to The Academy voluntarily, he will still dislike the man for allowing it to happen.

Tommy became Theseus because of Philza – one way or another. Because of him, he receives years of torture and trauma.

“We’ll tell him,” Dream promises. “But we need him to settle him a little longer. If he finds out–”

“-he’ll want to leave,” Sapnap finishes his words. And they both Philza can protect Tommy now, even though years ago – he couldn’t.

There is a knock on the door, then. Dream quickly ends the call and reaches for Tommy's mask, to slide on his face. He grabs his own.

"XD?" Philza asks, hearing his voice as he steps in. He does not give Dream enough time to pull his mask and stands blankly when he realizes Dream does not have a mask on. "Oh, apologies—"

Dream exhales and discards the mask. Wilbur and Techno know of Dream. To his knowledge, Philza does not know of his existence. And the expression on his features confirms his thought.

It is the first time Philza sees Dream's face. His green eyes narrow and all his scars are visible. They stare. Their eyes do not leave each other.

"Philza," Dream then acknowledges. And shuffles in front of Tommy, where his blond hair pulls in front of his face, as he had put on the younger boy's mask with a rush.

"I was informed that you had made your way onto our grounds. Although I didn't recall planning a meeting."

"I was checking up on him," Dream says. "Theseus,"

Philza's eyes widen a fraction. Dream sees concern. "Is he okay?"

"He called me," Dream admits. "He was having a panic attack."

Philza steps closer. Dream stands up. He blocks Tommy's view from him, and his eyes edge into him. He hopes Philza is scared by his scars.

"He needs to know," Dream then states. "Soon."

"Why?" Philza furrows his eyebrows.

"Because he deserves to."

"He hasn't settled in yet," Philza sighs. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"Philza," Dream mutters and lowers his voice. "He hasn't shown you his face either, I think it's pretty obvious he hasn't."

"Why?" Philza pleads and Dream almost smirks. "Why is he so scared?"

"Theseus isn't scared. But he'll show you when he's ready,"

"How do we make him ready?" Philza asks and stumbles on his words.

Dream takes out a knife from his pocket, while Phil stares at it. "You won't make him do anything. He'll come to you when he's ready. So don't fucking push him, or anything he does not want. Make sure Wilbur talks to him and Technoblade does not pester. And you, have to make sure you're not constantly asking questions." Dream glares, his eyes reflecting the sharp blade. "He's gone through shit. It isn't easy to talk about it."

"You care for him," Philza notes, respectfully. "You're close to him."

"At The Academy, we were taught to not become close to each other," Dream mutters. "But Theseus is still my brother."

"I understand that."

“I don’t think you do,” Dream gazes at his knife. “Yet.”

“Pardon?”

“You may be blood-related, but you won’t understand him. Don’t pretend you do – don’t act like it. I’ve seen the kid’s experiences; I know the trauma he’s experienced. You can’t take that away.”

Phil sighs. “I don’t plan of it.”

Fourteen tastes blood and sweat.

The sweat is his own, the blood is not.

He is praised. “Well done,” they say. “We expect higher from you, however.”

Higher, *greatness*. Fourteen must achieve greatness. If he completes a mission, then he should have finished it faster. If he takes down a Graduate during training, then it is not enough. And if he pulls a bullet through the head of the other, then he must do better.

So, he learns. Through bruises and burns, to only be *great*.

If he does not, Fourteen faces repercussions. He faces punishment, he is thrown into the white room and forced to forget previous mistakes until perfection.

(“You are a monster,” they say. “No one wants you, but us.”)

Unlovable, are harsh whispers. *Unvalued*.

There are stories of him when he makes it to Graduation. He excels past all present Graduates and is labeled as Graduate One. Stories ensue of him being born with skill and technique. But he starts at the bottom and works to the top. Other rumors state that he is trapped in the white room for days, sometimes months, to ensure his wrongs are undone. He will not confirm nor deny them.

He is Dream now, and cruelty and death rush through his veins.

He is once an assassin; he will forever be one. He will have scars and stitches, and he will struggle to sleep some nights with the hauntings of his past. They make him who he is, whether he likes it or not.

Dream sees the trauma that Tommy must live through as Theseus, the pain that is inflicted and abuse he will fight to escape for – Dream is present through all of it. He understands Tommy, they understand each other’s situations more than anyone else.

He refuses for Philza to change him. To mend and break him.

He is Tommy now; he is once Theseus. Yet, he will never be the ten-year-old boy he was – the

version of himself that Phil and his family know.

They cannot remove that life from him – they cannot fix him. They cannot make him better. Tommy does not need fixing. But he deserves love and a family, and Dream decides that Philza, Wilbur, and Techno will be that for him – not enough, but enough. They cannot change what is done and change his life – but they can help him live a better one.

Tommy will always be like Dream. They will always sleep with a knife under their pillows and freeze at familiar sounds.

(His green eyes settle on the boy. He sees himself in him, a younger self, a younger version.

He will do anything he can, to protect him.)

But Tommy and Dream are also different. Tommy can be loved. Dream can't.

Punz won't say he has the easiest upbringing.

He is ten the first time he learns to use a gun.

He is sixteen the first time he must use one.

He raises his younger brother under the harsh stars of Floridian night skies and waits for the day that they can be free. His brother's name is Gray, and he has the deepest shade of purple eyes he's ever seen. Some say good genetics – but they never know their parents.

Punz smokes and they live fifteen minutes away from the beach. Gray is eight and he is fourteen when they first find their first place to stay. An abandoned house, which can be deemed an attic considering the main section of the housing is unsavable. Maybe if Punz is not just fourteen, he could save it. But he can't.

They spend their days on the beach and waxing boards. He can still feel the sand pressed against his skin and the salt of the sea when he closes his eyes.

Punz teaches Gray everything he can until he can't. They cannot afford to go to school, and he steals books from libraries to get Gray a decent education. But Gray must be street smart – so he learns how to use a knife and a gun. He learns how to be quick on his feet and lie out of situations.

They fall on the sand, under the stars, and promise each other that one day it will get better.

"I promise," Punz says every night, as he turns to the younger boy who watches the world with wonder.

Gray is ten when he is stolen.

It happens fast, Punz sometimes dreams of the moment his world falls apart at night. He does, for

years straight, as a growing pit in his stomach expands and he can no longer breathe. So, he gives up cigarettes and moves.

He makes a promise to find his brother again. One last promise. And then another for them to be free.

He uses a gun when he is sixteen, and his heart has never raced so fast, and death has never felt so close. He sees red, and *feels* red, and knows the length he must go through, to get his brother back. He trains, and learns, and sees the world in a vision he has not realized before. Because the world is harsh, and life is cruel, and he must come to terms with that when he is *sixteen*.

He is too young, but Gray is too young when he is taken and Punz will never stop until he gets him back. Because they have each other, and without him, Punz has no one.

He learns over time, of a life of exploitation and a world of fighting. Where children are taught of a world of nothing but murder and weapons, and they must kill for survival. Punz is seventeen when he becomes an assassin, and fights for his life – and to find his brother's.

Punz discovers one day, of a mission they send the children that cannot keep up. Gray may not be a part of the mission – but it is his last chance for getting his brother back. Punz will never stop, so he goes.

He finds a deserted land, with rocks and the sun.

Eventually, he also finds his brother.

He clings onto Gray, the first time he sees him again, but gently because Gray looks weak and malnourished. (Punz has never been so gentle before.)

He cards his fingers through the boy's brown hair and dips his nose. "I'm here," he says again and again and promises that neither of them will leave again. "I'm sorry," he also says and doesn't remember when his heart has felt so strong.

It is two years since they have seen each other. Punz has changed, but so has Gray. Gray sleeps for a long time and wakes in fright.

Gray can also not remember him.

In fact, he threatens Punz at gunpoint.

"Get the fuck away from me," Gray manages to steal his weapon, and use it. Punz's arms fly in the air, in surrender. "I don't know who you are – but I'm going to fucking shoot if you step closer."

"Gray," his voice breaks. "Gray, it's me."

"I don't know who you are," Gray shouts, but he doesn't sound like Gray – he sounds unfamiliar. He shakes violently and he's too skinny. "But get the *fuck* away from me."

"I'm your brother," Punz repeats, and Gray shoots.

He misses, luckily. Punz has learned a couple of things too, as an assassin. He's fast on his feet too, and slides the gun out of Gray's arms, and pin him away. His breaths are heavy, and he pins Gray's arms behind his back.

He exhales and inhales deeply as Gray struggles between his grip and the sound of the bullet

echoes through his ears. “We don’t do that around here, kid. We don’t shoot.” He does not mention his life as an assassin – well, former assassin now that his brother is back.

“Get off me!” Gray shouts and struggles more. Exhaustion settles within his purple eyes. “I don’t know who you are! Fuck off!”

Punz breathes heavily. “That’s okay, that’s okay,” he repeats, but maybe it’s a reassurance to himself at not the kid. “It’s going to be okay, Gray. I promise.”

“How do you know my name!?” Gray faints from fatigue, Punz doesn’t exactly know. As he lays on wooden floorboards and watches his brother – that things will be different from now on.

Gray wakes up later. “I have a friend,” Punz tells him, softly. (Punz is never soft.) “He’ll help us and get us off our feet. He’ll help you too – and maybe you can remember shit about our past. But no shooting, and no screaming. We’ll talk. Do we have a deal?”

Gray does not talk for weeks.

It is week five when he speaks for the first time.

“Purpled,” He says. “Call me Purpled.”

George is not free. He never will be.

Death is his final liberty. It is stolen from his grasp, and he is left alive.

Caged and handcuffed to life; he lives.

George is eternal. He tests his theory on his skin and bleeds. He flames himself on fire, and his skin is left red and swollen. He stops feeling hurt a long time ago but living has never felt so painful.

George is alone for weeks. He tries starving himself to death, and when that doesn’t work, he does not drink.

They think they will receive freedom when The Academy crumbles. But George sits between the ash of the school before him and watches the distant stone walls, carefully. The sunset is hidden and so is his escape from this all.

He decides he will find Dream and Sappnap – and Theseus. He’ll devise a plan beforehand, and he’ll take down The Academy once and for all with them. They may take away his freedom and throw away his key, but George will not let The Academy continue any longer.

He has a lifetime to stop them.

Chapter End Notes

tldr; brothers being brothers? (plot twist or not: they're all traumatised)

hey guys :) thanks for reading and apologies for the longer wait! had a bit of writer's block.

also, not much tommy in these previous chapters but it will basically be him next chapter (i think)

I MADE A TWITTER PLEASE FOLLOW (SHAMELESS SELF PROMOTION)
THANKS!!!!

@pathicsoul

<https://twitter.com/ppsychoathsoul>

I'LL POST SNEAK PEAKS (and i'll dm a couple people for certain things they want to see like specific characters/backgrounds/memories from the academy they want to see, and include them in the story if you guys think this is a good idea!!)

Future

Chapter Summary

Dream's truth is that he wants to know everything about Wilbur. Not that he cares about the guy – Dream couldn't give two shits. But he wants to know what Wilbur is like and if he'll be a good enough brother for Tommy, who deserves only the best.

He agrees with Phil to stay for the morning to scope out Wilbur and seek information from Technoblade.

He also agrees because he misses the kid.

Chapter Notes

long wait so long chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stares oddly at Dream. "What are you doing here?"

Dream leans on the wall opposite him, a knife spinning between his fingers as he watches him. Tommy watches the blade spin between his skin, before tilting his head upwards at his older brother, to figure out why he was in the same room, and not back at Quackity's.

"You'll remember," Dream then sighs and drops the knife. "You had a panic attack."

"Oh."

Dream rolls his eyes. "You're not sleeping enough, so new rule, you'll call me when you wake up."

Tommy squints his eyes. "How the fuck does that work?" Tommy's lack of sleep won't disappear, even if Dream makes him report to him every morning.

"Phil's getting you sleeping pills," Dream then says. "We talked about it."

In under ten seconds, Tommy stands with a knife in his right arm, three steps closer to Dream. He reveals the blade for him to see. "You better have not told him anything else."

"Tommy," Dream rolls his eyes. "Put the knife down."

"No, bitch," Tommy grumbles. "Tell me what you fuckin' told him!"

"Try," Dream smirks. "Try using that knife, I dare you."

Tommy dares.

He raises the knife and Dream steps back, flickering his weapon forward. Tommy's stance is

defensive, but he is prepared to attack, as he pulls the knife in the older's direction, and kicks his leg in the air, towards Dream's shoulder. He steadies his figure against the wall, and pushes himself forward, for Tommy to stumble, not fall.

They fight like brothers, not like assassins. Not now, because death doesn't loom, and this is a game to them. It always has been, and Dream always wins. But Tommy won't give up until the day he dies, he won't surrender.

Until he has to. Dream kneels on his back, and Tommy feels his smirk without having to see his face. "Well?"

"Fuck you."

"I'll tell you what I told Phil," Dream sings. "But don't attack me."

"No promises," Tommy says, and Dream helps him up. He lays on the bed as Dream stands in the middle of the room, cracking his knuckles absently.

"I told him you had a panic attack. You were asleep when I told him to back off, and to give you space."

Tommy's eyebrows raise. "And he listened?"

"I think he did, but he knows what happens – if he does not," Dream smiles, but there is a stare in his eyes that Tommy feels. "He knows you're my brother. If he hadn't picked that up, already."

"And who's fault is that?" Tommy rolls his eyes as Dream threatens him with a knife in the air.

"I'll pin you down again, don't think I won't."

"I'll fucking clart you."

"*Clart?*" Dream raises his eyebrows and bursts out laughing – only his laughing is wheezing and makes Tommy laugh too. Their moment of brotherhood is cut short at a knock on the door, and a loud grunt. In seconds or less, Dream reaches for his mask and Tommy shoves his on.

"Can I come in?" Is Phil's voice and Dream ends up throwing his mask to the side.

"What the fuck?" Tommy hisses as the door opens. "What are you doing?"

"He knows," Dream mutters back in French as Phil steps into the room and closes the door behind him. "He saw me without it on."

"What the fuck?"

Dream swaps to Greek quickly, watching Tommy's eyes with certainty. "He doesn't know of me, only Techno and Wilbur. It'll be fine."

"Careless," Tommy mumbles and Dream glares.

"Say that again."

"Is everything okay?" Philza interrupts with uncertainty, laughing lightly. "I heard a noise, so I assumed Theseus was awake."

"He is," Dream answers for him with a nod. "I'll have to return to Las Nevadas. Quackity's waiting

for me.”

“Stay,” Philza suggests. “Until lunch at least? We wouldn’t mind your company, XD.” Tommy doesn’t mind the idea – in fact, he’ll be pleased with it. Because it allows him to leave his room and train with Dream while being able to ignore Techno and his requests to spar together.

“I’ll leave after noon,” Dream sighs and Tommy is glad his mask covers his smile well.

“Well then,” Philza clasps his hands together with a short glance in Tommy’s direction. “Breakfast will soon be ready. Will you join us, or are you doing to – uh, eat in here with Theseus?”

“We’ll eat in the dining room.” Dream replies and Tommy almost groans, glaring at Dream.

“Very well,” He glances at Tommy. “I’d like a word with you, Theseus if that’s alright.”

Tommy expects Dream to hesitate and ask questions, but he doesn’t. He stands with a glance at the two of them and exits the room. But the door is left partially open, and Dream has left his weapons in the room while taking his mask with him.

“I’m sorry,” Philza says first, and Tommy takes a moment to recover. “I apologize, Theseus.”

“What?” Tommy splutters. “For what?”

“I shouldn’t have pushed you, nor asked unneeded questions. We’ll step back, but I want you to know – that we’re here to help you.”

He doesn’t need help, Tommy wants to say. His family does – his future needs it. But he’s alright now because he has Dream and Sapnap. He’s fine.

“Okay,” he nods, unsurely. “Thanks.”

Dream’s truth is that he wants to know everything about Wilbur. Not that he cares about the guy – Dream couldn’t give two shits. But he wants to know what Wilbur is like and if he’ll be a good enough brother for Tommy, who deserves only the best.

He agrees with Phil to stay for the morning to scope out Wilbur and seek information from Technoblade.

He also agrees because he misses the kid. It is lonely without Tommy, and as Quackity’s plan continues, Dream knows they will only see each other less.

It’s a brother’s intuition – may be an assassin’s intuition too. He needs to make sure Wilbur treats Tommy right and that they’ll be able to defend him in case of harm.

(He knows Tommy can defend himself well. But he’s once hired a bodyguard, and now making sure Wilbur and Technoblade are enough because Tommy will always be the youngest of their

group and he feels obliged to protect him – and make sure others do too.)

He shoves on his mask and listens to Tommy and Philza's conversation from inside the room. He makes sure to keep the door open because he doesn't exactly fully trust Philza yet.

"I want you to know," He hears Philza say. "That we're here to help."

Dream leans on the wall and digs his hands into his pockets when Tommy exits the room. He pretends to be concentrated elsewhere, but Tommy sees through him.

"I would have told you what he said, but you listened," Tommy rolls his eyes and Dream shoves him lightly. Philza exits the room, and Dream notices his analyzing blue eyes.

(They remind him of Tommy's. The way Tommy is aware of the danger and surveys the room. The glimpse in their eyes is identical.)

"I don't think you know your way around here, Dream?" Philza chuckles. "Theseus, you can show Dream, can't you? I have a meeting this morning, so I'll be missing breakfast."

Tommy nods his head stiffly. Dream rolls his eyes at the younger. "Okay, thanks Philza." The man takes another glance at Tommy before he leaves.

"He's trying," Dream picks up when he leaves.

"And?"

"You aren't."

Tommy scoffs. "Why would I? He's a connection I can't have." Tommy turns to leave, and Dream is startled before he jogs up to the kid and grabs his shoulder.

"Tommy," he forces him to look at you.

"Call me Theseus," Tommy grits. "They'll hear."

They are in an empty hallway and wait for the elevator to arrive at them. No one is around, but Tommy's right, they shouldn't take any chances. "We're not there anymore. Connections are okay."

"Not with Philza, they're not. I can't trust him." Tommy mutters. "I thought you were on my side with this?"

Dream is – Dream *was*. But Philza is Tommy's family, and family is connection. Family is *care*.

Tommy doesn't know that yet – he doesn't know that they are his family.

"You can't trust him," Dream agrees, and the elevator doors slide open. As they step in, he rearranges his words. "But he's trying to make everything easier. So are Wilbur and Technoblade. It's not bad to talk."

Tommy purses his lips. "Sure."

Dream ruffles his hair. "Who knows? Maybe Wilbur and you will be best friends soon."

Tommy's eyes change and darken. "No," he deadpans. "That won't happen. Ever."

“What about that kid? Tubbo?”

“We aren’t friends,” Tommy says but Dream can see through the lie.

The elevator doors open and the two step out.

“I remember the way,” Tommy says. “Unlike you, since my memory hasn’t turned to shit.”

“I’d take that back if I were you,”

“No,” Tommy denies. “It’s utter shit. Sapnap’s memory is better than yours.”

Dream grins behind his mask. “Is that so?”

“It is.”

Dream shoves him and Tommy shoves him back. They would go under a full-out war if they weren’t expected at breakfast. That, and Dream’s hungry.

The agency is bigger than Dream recalls. Tommy passes by agents, and pays them no attention, as they nod his way or divert their eyes. Dream has a feeling Philza has told them of Tommy’s position. If he hasn’t said his relation to him, Philza has admitted he’s important. Dream can see their fear.

Or maybe it’s because Dream wears his mask, and they know he’s XD. They know he is from The Academy and could take them all down with his eyes closed, between seconds. With Tommy, in an even shorter time.

They are seated in the dining room when they arrive. But they – is quite a lot of people. He sees Wilbur, Techno, Tubbo, and a couple of other recognizable faces as well as new ones. Dream estimates there are about thirty-five people in the room, and he’d count properly if his attention wasn’t focused on Tommy, whose eyes surveyed the room, hesitantly.

“What’s wrong?” Dream nudges him.

“Nothing,” Tommy mumbles and they find the two seats that are next to each other. Dream suspects that Philza has already told Wilbur and Techno that they will be present at breakfast. His thoughts are confirmed at their look behind their stares and their silent expressions.

“Theseus,” Wilbur greets with hesitance. “And XD,”

Tommy doesn’t say anything, sitting down. Dream follows him, nodding his head at Tommy’s brothers. It’s weird to him – their titles. He decides to ignore it. “Wilbur.”

Wilbur watches XD carefully. “When did you arrive? I wasn’t informed that Quackity and yourself were coming around this morning.”

“Wilbur,” Techno mumbles under his breath, lifting a glass to his lips as he takes a swift drink. “Drop it.”

“Just wanted to check up on the kid,” Dream says and Tommy scowls.

“I’m not a kid.”

Wilbur watches them, and Dream notices heat.

“Eat your food,” Dream mumbles at the younger boy when Wilbur and Technoblade resume another conversation. “It won’t bite you.”

“It could,” Tommy continues in French.

“You know it’s won’t.”

Their food has been poisoned before. Not here, though. Not outside The Academy. Although, paranoia was present for a while after leaving, and Tommy had only eaten packaged and sealed foods for a few months. He lived off premade sandwiches and puddings, which he surprisingly had not gotten sick of.

“I’ll eat,” Tommy then groans. “Because it will make you happy.”

“It will, kid.” Dream nods and lifts his mask a fraction to raise a spoonful of eggs to his lips. Tommy copies his action, sighing. Unlike Dream, his mask is made from thin leather and cotton and is easy to roll up past his lips. He takes one bite, and then another. Techno and Wilbur’s eyes remain on him, surprised.

Tommy manages to eat half his plate. He takes a drink of his juice and sits back as Dream finishes. “I’m done.”

“We can train then,” Dream speaks in English, so Techno and Wilbur know. As they stand, so do the other two.

Dream looks at them unimpressed at their bluntness. “We’ll watch,” Wilbur says. “I can show you the way.”

“Theseus can show me,” Dream responds, gruff.

“We insist,” Techno nods his head, and Dream glares. “Lead the way, Wilbur.”

Wilbur leads away and Dream stays alert. He doesn’t show it though, his shoulders unhunched and his eyes straight ahead, not looking out for exits as he would usually do. He does eye Wilbur and Techno’s back, keeping an eye on their weaknesses. It’s better to know them now than later.

Tommy probably knows. He asks. “What are their weaknesses?” He questions him in fluent Greek.

“Wilbur’s untrained,” Tommy mumbles. “If he is, it was a while ago. Techno’s weakness is that he relies on his weapons too much. He’s not good at reading language either.”

Dream nods and smirks. Wilbur turns. “What language was that?”

The two boys blink. “Greek,” Techno mutters beside him and there is a flash in Wilbur’s eyes, before he turns again, and continues walking. Tommy shrugs it off and Dream looks uncertainly.

The training hall is large, and the selection of weapons is extensive. Dream eyes Technoblade and Wilbur as they stand in the middle of the room before they let the two assassins do their own thing. Techno goes to train in the corner of the room, and Wilbur sits back to watch. Dream doesn’t mind an audience. He won’t pay attention to them; it was important to ignore students of Teachers who would watch his training and spars at The Academy. They provided as a distraction and Dream refuses to lose.

“We’ll stretch,” Dream conducts. “Then we’ll spar.”

Tommy nods his head. Together, they pull out mats and between blinks, Dream sees a sight of The Academy, when the two train. Tommy sticks by Dream and Dream shouts at the kid because he must do better, he must survive. They go through techniques through the morning, and during recreation periods that were so rare, Tommy, Sapnap, and George and he would do joined fights.

It had been Dream and Tommy against Sapnap and George. Tommy had a similar fire to Sapnap, and they could never pair together.

Dream and Tommy against everyone. And everything against them.

Dream stretches and watches Tommy as he does. “Don’t bend your legs,” Dream instructs. “Your back isn’t straight.”

Tommy swears and flips him off. Here, they do not shout and hit. They can laugh and tease. They aren’t assassins here, even if the murder is present within their blood.

After their stretches, Tommy asks to throw knives. Dream rolls his eyes and accepts.

He stands behind the boy as he starts. Taking the metal weapons like a personal possession, he presses his skin against the flat side of the blade, before fitting the handle between his grip. He does not hesitate after that, and his throws are consecutive.

Dream crosses his arms over his chest and nods slowly. “Fix your stance, Theseus.”

“I am.” He fixes it.

Wilbur stands and watches closer. Dream keeps his eyes on Tommy until he feels Wilbur stand behind him.

The man’s voice is soft, quiet. “I haven’t seen him do this up close before,” Wilbur admits, and Dream raises his eyebrows. “We were told about the conditions of the school you grew up in – but it’s difficult to understand until you see it up close.”

“This is nothing,” Dream deadpans.

“I know,” Wilbur replies. “But his skill. He’s good.”

“Six years of training,” Dream tells him. “It’s what six years of training does.” And the constant thought of looming death, he adds in his mind.

Wilbur’s eyes hurt. “Yeah,” he whispers and watches Tommy close his eyes and aim. He flips knives over his shoulder and turns his back.

“Aim higher, Theseus,” Dream calls as Theseus throws. “That’s too high!”

“So, you guys grew up together?” Wilbur then questions and Dream frowns, side-eyeing him at his disrupt. “I shouldn’t ask – sorry then,”

“I don’t care,” Dream says. “We didn’t grow up together. We... survived together.” Maybe they did grow up together, maybe they didn’t. The Academy is a confusing place and an even more confusing place to explain. Because no one really knows why the Teachers are there or why the Headmaster intends to carve the children into something they are not. There are only questions, no answers, and they all learn to accept that years ago.

“Was there anyone else?” He then asks.

“Anyone what?”

“Anyone else you survived with?”

There is, Dream thinks. But there isn’t because George is gone and Sapnap and Tommy are all he has left. “Yes.”

“Oh.”

At the silence, Dream says, “I didn’t know the kid well until I graduated. Took a while to warm up.”

“It’s hard to understand,” Wilbur then says.

“You won’t, you won’t ever understand,” Dream shrugs. “And that’s the honesty of it.”

“Did you see that?” Tommy turns quickly, and Dream’s full attention turns to the younger boy. “Did you fuckin’ see that?”

“I did,” Dream smiles. “Well done.”

As Tommy retrieves the knives, Wilbur watches Dream carefully. “You know him well.”

“I’d like to think I do.”

“What do I do?” Wilbur sighs. “What do I do?”

Dream thinks.

Tommy’s different from Sapnap and him. Dream can talk to others about The Academy – hence his and Wilbur’s conversation. But Tommy can’t – he will keep things to himself and only open up when he has to. Recently, he talks to him and Sapnap more – he knows that he has a support system and that they can listen.

“Don’t push him,” Dream says simple. “He doesn’t know you’re his brother, so don’t act like one.”

“Wha-at?” Wilbur stutters.

“He doesn’t need a brother right now,” Dream tells him. “He needs a friend.”

Tommy knows he has Dream and Sapnap as brothers. Dream will step down when he finds out about his family – his real family. They may share scars and glimpses of the past, but Wilbur, Techno, Philza, and Tommy – they hold a connection through blood. He is them, they are him.

“Okay,” Wilbur says slowly. “I can do that.”

“You won’t understand. But right now, you don’t need to, to talk to him.”

Tommy returns when he finishes. He asks Dream to spar, who can’t refuse.

Wilbur stands by the wall.

“No knives?” Tommy questions.

“No knives,” Dream frowns. “Or weapons.”

Tommy grins and tosses the blade in his boot to the side. “Fine.”

They begin. Tommy pulls the first move, through a punch fast and aiming for Dream's shoulder. Dream stumbles, but not for long. He notices Tommy's tough posture and the cockiness that has set within him, from being able to make the first move.

So, it's on, Dream thinks and swings.

Tommy's always been fast. He's able to move past Dream swiftly and keep the pace moving. But Dream is the number one Graduate of The Academy for a reason and even though he has to regain some of his form back from the lack of consistent training, he's still good.

He won't tell Tommy, but he's a good fighter. (He doesn't want to boost the kid's ego any more than what it is.) Dream won't admit either, that the fight is easy.

Tommy is a good fighter, but Dream is also the best.

So, they end up with Tommy laying stomach-down on the floor, Dream's knee on his back, and his arm pressed against his head to stop Tommy from moving. Their panting is loud and disruptive, and Tommy's body shakes, as he struggles for breaths.

"Give up?" Dream questions in German.

"Fuck you," Tommy breathes out. "No."

"Do your best."

Tommy attempts to move his body, and push against Dream's knee. He can't, and Dream presses harder, grinning behind his mask.

"That's enough," Techno appears. "You're hurting him."

Dream glances up and blinks at the shadow looming from above him. Technoblade stands before him and does not seem pleased. "XD."

"I'm fine," Tommy groans from the floor.

"You aren't, you're going to get hurt."

Dream scoffs. "He won't get hurt."

"How do you know that?"

Dream stands and pulls Tommy to his feet. "I won't hurt the kid, Technoblade," he spits his name. He knows he has. He knows he's hurt Tommy and he's not proud of it. But they do it to survive, Dream does it to live – as fucked up as it sounds.

"What the fuck is going on?" Tommy questions, clueless. "So, what if we hurt? We did it to survive."

Technoblade's eyes snap to Tommy's. Emotion stirs in his eyes and Dream doesn't feel right about the guy. He doesn't feel right about anyone here. A part of him wants Tommy to come back, to come back to the apartment, and for him to wake up to Sapnap and him fighting again.

But he needs Tommy to be safe, and he is safest with Philza.

Technoblade leaves the room then. Wilbur follows behind. Tommy watches Dream with confusion, but his eyes extend to the knives that rest on the floor, excitedly. "Can we?"

Dream rolls his eyes. But he smiles anyway. “Sure.”

Before Theseus – it is only Dream, Sapnap, and George.

Dream had watched George’s graduation, with a knowing they’d spend their futures together. They would die on the same paths, together or beyond.

(Dream later finds out how horribly wrong he is.)

George is smart and carries his own, and Dream knows that he can survive on his own if worse comes to worst. Because George’s mind is extraordinary, and he hasn’t seen anything like it before.

Then there is Sapnap, who is slightly shorter, yet stronger. He’s high in his class and he screams to be seen. Dream vows then and there, to protect him. To save him before himself.

(He does not tell anyone else of this promise.)

“You know,” Sapnap says once, under the night. “I thought you were once a test.”

Dream hums, turning to him. “What?” They watch blue skies and morning birds, as they await their mission to commence.

“Yeah,” Sapnap chuckles. “I saw you as a test, I thought you were once. You got close too easily, so I assumed that the Teachers put you and Gogs as a challenge – to see if I’d get close or not.”

“You failed,” Dream says.

“But so did you.”

They do not care, nor do they hold connections.

Yet Dream does.

He sees love in his past, he sees life. Dream hopes to have it one day, to feel it within his soul and smile within their presence. So, yearns for it – people, people to call *family*.

Dream is meant to be the strongest assassin, but maybe he’s the weakest of them all. Because death has never felt so reassuring if George and Sapnap stay alive. Dream has cold stares at his words are hard of boulders, they cause agents to crumble and fall. Yet, all Dream wants is love.

He finds it with Sapnap and George. Then one day, Theseus.

Theseus, who is young and deserves a bright future. Theseus, who is undisciplined but will learn his ways soon. Theseus who deserves a life better than this one.

He'll make it to graduation, Dream promises himself. So, he shoves the kid and forces him to train more, to rise higher than his class. He makes sure that he does not fall behind and persists.

The day Sapnap saves Dream during a mission, when they bleed and bleed and their death awaits – and Sapnap saves him, is the day Dream knows he has to worry about him less. Sapnap can hold his own, and he focuses on making sure Theseus lives. He is the youngest – he is so young.

Dream cares. Dream bleeds and Dream feels family. He does what he is not meant to be, and he realizes he will never be a perfect assassin because of his connections. Not that he cares, Dream accepts it. He accepts that his fate will be because he will save his family. He knows that he will die to protect them. He knows that he won't go out any other way.

Dream is gone when Wilbur approaches Tommy.

He sees him from the corner of his eyes, he feels him a long time before. It's an assassin thing – he feels Wilbur's presence in the room and his eyes dig into his soul. But the feeling isn't as haunting and suffocating as it is usually when it comes to Wilbur. Something in the air is different.

"Theseus," Wilbur approaches with delicate words. Tommy sits on the mats in the training hall, doing lazy stretches. He has been here all day. "Can I sit down?"

"If you want."

Wilbur sits down.

"How are you?"

Tommy glares. "If you're going to ask me shit like that, you can leave."

"Sorry, sorry," Wilbur chuckles. "It's weird hearing your voice so much."

"I can stop." Tommy deadpans.

"No," Wilbur almost shouts. "I didn't mean it in a bad way,"

Tommy rolls his eyes and drops his arms from behind his head. "Did you need something? Is it dinner or did Philza need me?"

"No, I just wanted to talk?" But he phrases it more as a question.

"Just talk?"

"Just talk," Wilbur confirms, and they both stare away momentarily. "I won't ask anything you don't want me to ask. We can just talk."

"Okay," Tommy mutters.

“You’re good at fighting,” Wilbur smiles. “I did expect it of course, but you are good.”

“I learned from the best.” He learns from Dream and Sapnap and George. The best in The Academy.

“XD?” Wilbur asks, but without prying and without a tone of wanting for information.

Still, Tommy isn’t going to give information so easily. “Yeah, I guess.”

“I can fight,” Wilbur then says. “Techno’s better, but I can hold up my own.”

“I doubt that,” Tommy smirks.

“You’re too cocky.”

Tommy is not cocky. They are taught against it. “We can fight then.”

“No,” Wilbur refuses. “I don’t want to be beaten by a child – Techno beats me enough,”

“I’m not a child,” Tommy mumbles and there is a shine in Wilbur’s eyes. He chuckles lightly and smiles wider.

“You know, you recognize me of someone,” Wilbur says. “Someone.”

Tommy. But he is Theseus here, not Tommy.

Is he really Theseus, though? Tommy doesn’t know. Because Theseus would not get close to Tommy or speak to Philza. Theseus is calculated and does not speak with emotion and pain. He is quiet and reserved and nothing like all the versions he pretends to be.

“You remind me of someone,” Tommy then says, and Wilbur’s eyes widen a fraction. He doesn’t expect such a reaction from him.

“I do? Who?”

Tommy shakes his head. He won’t admit that Wilbur is somewhat like George. They aren’t too similar, but he sees his older brother’s eyes behind Wilbur’s brown. He sees some part of George in Wilbur, or perhaps it is his mind letting go and realizing that he doesn’t have George anymore.

“We’ll leave,” Wilbur announces and stands. “You haven’t left in a while.”

“I’m not finished training, Wilbur.”

“You are,” Wilbur frowns. “And I don’t mean the training hall. I mean outside.”

“I can do that?” Tommy’s eyebrows furrow. “But it’s dangerous.”

“So, we’ll be safe.”

So that’s how it goes. Wilbur tells Tommy to go to his room and change out of his raining gear. *They will be safe*, Wilbur promises, and they will be quick. So quick, that no one will know they’re gone. It doesn’t matter to Tommy, though. He’ll blame it all on Wilbur if anything goes wrong.

“You can’t leave,” Dream tells him. “Until this over, I need to trust you, that you’ll stay here.”

“Sure.”

“Tommy,” Dream says louder. “Trust.” Dream waits for it, he waits for Tommy’s promise.

“Trust,” Tommy responds, and promises.)

Tommy breaks his promise. He doesn’t mean to, and it is not like Dream will know anyway.

They won’t get caught. He’ll make sure of it.

Wilbur knocks on his door three times. He leans by the wall, and his eyes reach Tommy’s, as he pushes his door open slightly. “Let’s go,” Wilbur says, and Tommy nods his head. “Don’t be slow, Theseus.”

They reach the elevator but take the stairs. As they travel down, the souls of their shoes pressing against the floor and reacting a rift of an echo, Tommy questions Wilbur. “Why?”

“Why, what?”

“Why are we going?”

Wilbur stops and shrugs. “If I, were you, I’d go insane stuck inside for weeks. And I know for a fact that Techno and Phil are busy this afternoon, so they won’t come looking for us.”

Tommy accepts his reasoning. Although he keeps the fact to himself that he won’t go insane. He lasted in the white room for quite some time, and he and his classmates had been locked in rooms for days before. Staying in an agency but more freedom he has had in a while is bearable. It’s nothing to his experiences.

Although Tommy knows his way around the Syndicate’s place well, Wilbur knows it better. He ditches busy hallways and finds an empty way to walk through and get to the back door. Tommy is sly and quick on his feet and follows behind him fast. Wilbur pushes Tommy back into the wall when he hears a sound.

Tommy flinches.

“Sorry,” Wilbur apologizes, and they quieten down. They hear Tubbo, who crosses the last hallway away from the last door. He’s on the phone.

“I know, Ranboo,” he says. “I fuckin’ know that. You know what Philza said about Theseus – to give him time and all of that shit. I get he’s his–”

Wilbur whispers harshly to Tommy, drowning Tommy out. “Take another route, not this way.”

Tommy nods his head, and he follows Wilbur away.

“That was close,” Wilbur states when they take a door away from the exit. This one takes them to the background, of the large fields and grassy view. It is where their agents commence outdoor training, and between the breath of the wind and Wilbur’s whispers, Tommy can remember a time of running until his legs would ache and his body was numb. They’d run through rain and Winter nights, and they would persist.

Tommy stares at the fields now, of stretching agents who joke around and laugh. He breathes out.

“Theseus,” Wilbur then says, and Tommy follows him out of the agency. Wilbur’s car is parked by a lot, and although Tommy is apprehensive and should not trust the man at all, he gets into his car. He’s gone against his training and Dream’s rules, but Tommy misses the feeling of freedom he’s

witnessed for the last couple of months.

“We’ll get fast food,” Wilbur grins. “And spoil our dinners.”

“Sure.” Tommy doesn’t really care.

As Wilbur drives, he turns on the radio and passes Tommy his phone. “Put on music.”

“Music?” He asks, unsure.

Wilbur deadpans, “You don’t know what music is?”

Tommy does. Even at The Academy, he recalls a melody that the Teachers used to play when they were younger. One that he can hardly recall now, although he should. Even with that, Dream was pretty quick to share with him music choices when they escaped. Even Sapnap had, who shared a similar liking for songs with Tommy.

“I do,” Tommy ends up responding. “But I don’t know what you like.”

“It doesn’t matter what I like, put something on.”

Tommy holds the phone easily. Wilbur sighs. “I don’t know the name.”

“That’s okay,” At a red light, Wilbur puts on a playlist.

The song is rough and slow. Tommy closes his eyes to listen. It isn’t anything like Dream’s loud, or Sapnap’s rap, but it’s somewhere in the middle. Tommy can’t describe it, but he enjoys it.

Not that he’ll admit it aloud. “Shit,” he says. “That was shit.”

“I saw you nodding your head along,” Wilbur points out his lie. “Here’s another.”

The next is slow and quiet. It fastens its pace soon, and Tommy finds himself sucked into the world of music. He enjoys how it makes him feel – which isn’t much nowadays. But he feels a story behind the melody, even if younger Theseus wouldn’t. His old self would have ignored the sounds and paid no attention to it.

But Tommy admits he’s changed – or changing at least. He talks to Wilbur now, he opens up more to his brothers.

“I like that instrument,” Tommy then says as a song plays, one without words.

“It’s the violin,” Wilbur says. “Techno plays the violin; I play the guitar.”

“Do you make, uh, songs?” Tommy questions and Wilbur hesitates and coughs.

“No, we uh, we don’t.”

The two reach the fast-food place but Wilbur decides to take the drive-through instead. He orders a meal, burger, and coke while Tommy stares at the noises and screens around him. He analyses the parking lot and keeps an eye out for anything suspicious. It’s something he has to do and when he finishes, Wilbur hands him a meal.

“A *Happy Meal*,” he laughs like he’s said a joke.

“What?”

“For you,” he says. “There’s a toy in there too.”

“Fuck you,” Tommy spits and Wilbur laughs.

They eat in the parking lot. Tommy is quiet as he drinks his Coke, it tastes good.

“I don’t know if anyone’s told you yet,” Wilbur decides to say. “But I used to have a brother.”

Tommy recalls. He recalls a Wilbur tells him as Tommy. But he’s Theseus now, to him. He has his odd mask on and he’s a different person.

“Oh,” he ends up saying.

“If he were still here,” Wilbur stares out the car window. “I’d imagine this is what we would do.”

Tommy hadn’t done this when Dream, not exactly. They eat food in their apartment, sometimes in front of the television. Tommy doesn’t know what he would do without Dream, even if he should not have attachments. Even if he shouldn’t care nor hold connections he does because its Dream and Dream is his brother. He has Sapnap, and once, he has George.

“What was his name?” Tommy asks but Wilbur doesn’t speak.

“He was taken at ten,” Tommy presses his lips against each other. “Everyone says he was my second half, but I can’t remember him too well.”

“Oh,” Tommy sighs. “I’m sorry.”

He can’t apologize well. But Wilbur takes it.

“It’s okay,” And he finally looks over. “I- you know—” He sighs. “Never mind, forget it.” Tommy blinks. “Fuck, there’s no point.”

“No point of what?”

“Nothing.”

Tommy places his drink down. “Is he gone? Or is he missing?”

“I don’t know,”

“I hope,” Tommy hesitates, reluctantly. He’s unsure how to form his words and he’s unsure how to talk to Wilbur. He finds himself being *Tommy*. *Tommy* messes around with Wil, *Tommy* who isn’t apprehensive and waiting. He finds himself not being able to control it – to be Tommy when he should be Theseus. “I hope he’s okay. Everyone deserves a brother.”

Wilbur lifts his head and watches his eyes, like what Dream does.

“I made it through The Academy,” Tommy gulps. “But XD helped me through most of it. I wouldn’t have lived if it weren’t for him. He was there for me when no one was. And he helped me live.”

Tommy feels his throat close.

He says to Dream that he’s alone through The Academy, that he’s lonely.

But he does have Dream and Sapnap and George. And they are always *there*.

Dream gives him medicine when he's unwell, so he survives. Sapnap trains him so he survives. George teaches him to be smart, so he survives.

He is the loneliest he will ever be when he's there, between the walls of The Academy. They are taught that they are unloved and monsters. But Tommy is fortunate to have three people who are there and will never be not there. And although George may not be here anymore – he once is. He once is so giving and willing to help him through life. So maybe he isn't so lonely but he is taught he is.

"XD helped me through a lot," Tommy coughs and feels something in his heart. "And my other brothers – they were there too. They cared enough so I could live."

"Yeah," Wilbur whispers.

"I hope you find your brother," Tommy turns. "I hope Quackity can help you too. Everyone deserves one."

Wilbur nods his head. His brown eyes shine, and he sighs. "Thanks, Theseus. Thanks."

That night, Tommy realizes things will happen.

Things will change.

He knows that the mission will come sooner than they think. When it does, he must be ready. He must train more, he must prepare.

He thinks of George. He thinks of Sapnap and Dream.

Tommy realizes that the inevitable will occur. The plan won't work, that something will go wrong. He trusts Quackity's plan and Philza's agents, but he stays awake for hours and thinks.

The following morning, when the moon rests and the sun arrives, alive, he realizes he will die if he has to.

Tommy will die for his brothers. He will die to save them and he will die to keep them safe.

So, Tommy prepares for death.

He cannot live without his brothers. So Tommy will die for them instead.

tldr; dysfunction

hey! it's been a while! thanks for reading and hope you liked :))
follow my twitter i'll post one shots or something idk @pathicsoul
and if ur like discussing theories or anything you want me to see use a hashtag like
#dogdaysao3 idk someone think of one for me

also comments make my day! thanks for all of them!!

Fault

Chapter Summary

“Sapnap,” Dream speaks lightly. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Sapnap does not say anything.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Dream repeats. “I need you to know that.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Punz watches his brother – or what is left of him, anyway.

Gray is his brother. *Purpled* cannot remember him or his past. He flinches at touch and keeps knives under his pillow at night. He is hesitant and does not speak, and when he does, there is a glance for permission in his eyes.

He is unlike Gray who is loud and is brought up on sarcasm. Who screams when he wants to and urges him to wake up and watch the sunset in the early morning.

Purpled is not Gray but regardless, he is still his brother.

Under the cold moon and cold air, Punz promises himself that he will help him and make things right again. He messed up once – he won’t make the same mistake again.

They move back to Florida. Instead of near the beach, they move closer to the city, and Punz rents a small apartment. He’s not wealthy but he has money saved from Quackity.

Purpled is hesitant at first. He almost refuses to go.

When they move back to Florida, things change.

“I’ll let you keep the gun,” he tells his younger brother who holds hollow and lifeless eyes. Purpled stares at him with nothingness. “But we’ll keep everything else in a bag, in my room. Deal?”

Purpled presses his lips together and contemplates. Eventually, he does agree.

It lasts three days before Punz wakes up to Purpled sneaking into his room, his arms pulling the closet doors open. They get into a fight, which ends up with Purpled taking a knife out of the bag, and Punz dodging and scrambling out of bed. Punz realizes that Purpled is much more trained and better than he is, his technique is flawless and while Punz fights rough and quick, Purpled is precise and sly.

But Punz has an advantage. He trains and the kid hasn’t been eating much. Punz uses his weight and height as an advantage and shoves him to the ground, pinning him down. He tosses the knives out of reach and presses his hands on his back until their labored breaths are all he hears.

After that, Punz does not fall asleep again.

He stays awake, either training or keeping an eye on Purpled. He manages to fit in a couple of hours of sleep between night and day, but it is rare because he must ensure Purpled is okay or Purpled is not trying to sneak out or that Purpled isn't throwing knives at walls again.

(He's stopped him from the latter, almost four times now.)

"Why don't you sleep anymore?" Purpled starts to talk to him and asks. He asks him to call him Purpled and isn't always fighting. "You're always awake."

"I sleep." Punz mutters as he reads the newspaper. He starts smoking again.

The scent of smoke fills the house and Punz hears the rustle of the old paper and the gears in Purpled's mind turn. "No, you don't."

Punz glances upwards. He is exhausted and his eyes close when he reads every passing inked word. The edition of the paper is old, he hasn't had the time to order a new subscription. "What?"

"You don't sleep," Purpled repeats, and Punz remembers how the kid notices everything too well. His eyes always move, and his face remains in a permanent glance of thought. He used to be able to read him well, and now it's harder. "Naps don't count."

"I don't have *time* to sleep," Punz mutters and drops the paper on the wooden table. There are two chairs on the table, but he doesn't know why he bothers. Purpled eats food in his room. "Do you want lunch? I'll make something."

"I'm fine."

"You didn't eat breakfast." Punz's eyes close. He takes a deep breath and urges himself to stand up. He'll make it a couple more hours before he'll dip. "What do you want?" Punz asks and presses his cigar into the ashtray.

Purpled shrugs. His eyes are careful, and he watches as Punz maneuvers into the kitchen, pulling out bowls and ingredients from the cupboard. Punz pulls open the fridge and takes out the butter and milk. The milk expires a month ago and smells weird. He throws it into the bin, sighing. There is a long-awaited trip to the grocery store he has put off.

"I can make you a PB and J," Punz says, half asleep. "Or do you want something else?"

"What's that?"

"PB and J it is then," He grabs the jelly and the peanut butter from the back of the cabinet, as Purpled watches carefully. He wonders if the kid will remember the mornings under the sun as they eat sandwiches with their toes in the sand. He wonders if he will ever get his memories back.

As he smothers butter on bread and screws the peanut butter jar open, Purpled leans forward. "Can you make pudding?"

"Uh, I guess?"

Purpled nods his head slowly. "Okay. We had that at The Academy."

Punz makes a mental reminder and hopes not to forget. He also has to introduce the kid to more food because he hadn't known of pizza and cake until the other day. He also has to get them out of this shitty apartment. He has to find time to sleep and get Purpled to open up a little more. He has to buy groceries and train and research more on The Academy and respond to Quackity's emails

and—

Punz is tired. He's exhausted.

(He is once a good brother. He is once good at this.)

Punz can't help but feel as if he's failing. But he's a brother and once Gray – now Purpled – will be his main priority. And Purpled must do anything to make sure that the kid is okay.

Over time, Sapnap sees more of Gray in Theseus.

They both like vanilla pudding.

(He sneaks his to Theseus when the Teachers are not watching, as he had to the boy before him.)

Sapnap sees the ash of The Academy in his sleep. He sees George along with it.

He stumbles into the kitchen after the nightmare, almost jumping when he notices Dream seated on one of the kitchen stools, scrolling on the computer.

"You gave me a heart attack," Sapnap steadies his breaths and reaches for a glass cup.

"You had a nightmare," Dream notes.

"A bad dream," He pulls the tap and lets the cup fill with water. "There's a difference."

"What's the difference then?"

Sapnap watches the cup slowly fill, as he thinks of a response. When the water reaches the brim of the cup, Dream interrupts. "Sapnap?"

"What?" he almost flinches, and his hands shake.

"What was the nightmare?" Sapnap doesn't bother to correct him this time. "Was it bad?"

"I don't know," Sapnap says plainly and stares at the water blank, again.

“How bad? One to fifteen?”

(“One to fifteen?” Dream asks after Sapnap is shot and has a bullet in his shoulder.

One is painless. Ten is the feeling of their hands on flame. Fifteen is that they’d rather be dead.

They use the measurement during missions or after lessons. Sapnap is honest and Dream treats him according to the number.

“Three.” Maybe Sapnap isn’t honest all the time.

“Three?” Dream rolls his eyes. “Try again.”

Sapnap grits his teeth and his eyes close. “I’ll give it a five then. It’s pretty bad.”)

“Sapnap?” Dream repeats now, as he had when they complete missions and something goes wrong. “Be honest.”

The dream isn’t too bad. Sapnap holds a match, and he creates the flame himself. He is the reason why The Academy results in flames. But it is not about that – it is about George who remains there, as Sapnap takes his life.

“This is your fault. You’re out of control,” they all say once.

Sapnap squeezes his eyes closed.

He focuses on the feeling in his hands. The cold glass presses against his skin, and he feels droplets stain his skin. It is taken from him a moment later, and the cup disappears from his grasp.

“Sit down,” Is Dream’s gruff voice. “Sit down, Sapnap.”

Sapnap sits down but he can’t stop shaking. He sees George’s last words. George’s last smile. George’s last breath.

“See you on the other side,” He hears George say, or perhaps he does not. The night is a blur, it is difficult to remember what was said and Sapnap’s last words to him.

He sees George though, between the flames, as he burns alive.

“Sapnap,” Dream interrupts. “Open your eyes.”

Sapnap opens his eyes, and Dream stands with his arm extended. A cup is in front of Sapnap’s face. “Drink, but you have to stop shaking.”

“Fuck you-u,” Sapnap mutters and takes the water, placing it on the table. He does not close his eyes again, and instead, leans back in his seat with sweat drowning him. His breath hitches and his legs bounce in anxiousness. He needs his mind somewhere else, away from George and away from The Academy.

Dream stays in front of him, staring.

“Breathe,” he then says. “Breathe, Sapnap.”

“You do that on the kid,” Sapnap stammers. Dream is usually the one that helps Tommy when he has a panic attack. Sapnap can only hopelessly watch as Dream instructs Tommy and Tommy listens. “Won’t work on me.”

“Breathe,” Dream repeats, and he does. Sapnap focuses on his own sounds that escape his lips as Dream leans forward on the counter, watching intently. “Keep going.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“I’m good,” Dream smiles small. “I’ll be here.”

Sapnap eventually stops shaking. His breaths aren’t so labored either, but he still feels dizzy. He swipes the glass from the counter and downs it in one go. He places it down and wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

“Now,” Dream starts. “Do you want to tell me what that was about?”

“George,” he says plainly, and Dream knows.

Although he knows, he continues. “George what?”

Sapnap exhales. “You know, Dream.”

“I want you to tell me.”

Sapnap groans. He’s stubborn but he prefers sleep. Although, he isn’t sure he’ll be able to rest after this. “I saw The Academy after I put it to flames. And I saw him with it.” He lowers his eyes and stares at his palms. There are faint scars and they’re covered with sweat. He gulps.

“Sapnap,” Dream speaks lightly. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Sapnap does not say anything.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Dream repeats. “I need you to know that.”

But it is Sapnap’s fault. It is his plan. He lights The Academy on flames. He does not plan for George to burn along with it. Had if he dropped the matches before, or if he had waited, or had done something else, then George would be with them. George would be alive.

Guilt eats him alive. It carves into his soul, and he can’t *breathe*.

“Sapnap,” Dream repeats. “*Sapnap*.”

Soon, Dream is at his side, a hand pressed on his shoulder and his lips by his ears. “Listen to my voice. Hear me.”

“I hear you,” Sapnap lifts his shaking hands. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

“Survivor’s guilt,” Dream says and Sapnap inhales. “You’re blaming yourself when you don’t need to.”

“But—”

“Get it into your thick skull, Sapnap,” Dream shouts. “It wasn’t your fault! You and George both made that choice to go ahead with the mission. And you won’t blame George because it isn’t his fault either. The Academy put you in that position to make those choices. Blame only them.”

“Okay,” Sapnap says after a moment. After his breaths slow and he opens his eyes. His hands still shake. “Okay, Dream.”

“I don’t think you believe me.”

Sapnap doesn’t think he believes Dream either.

“But you will,” Dream then says. “I’ll make sure of it.”

Tommy stares at the pills on his desk, unsure. His hands reach out, however, falters.

He sees night behind the curtains of his room. Everyone is asleep, yet he remains awake because he dreads the thought of the faces and the blood and screaming in between.

Dream calls him before he sleeps, *“Take one, Tommy. If they don’t work, you don’t have to take them again.”*

He still contemplates, however, because there is a dread of sleep that keeps him awake.

He goes to find Tubbo instead. He knows for a fact that the boy doesn’t sleep and if he does, he usually ends up resting in one of the beanbags in his room.

However, Tommy finds himself in the training room again. The lights are on, and he steps inside, unsure. When he notices no one is around, he moves to the weapon room. He decides that for tonight though, he will leave the knives alone and use the punching bags instead.

He’s bored and Tommy doesn’t mind something different.

Tommy wraps his fists with tape and heads over towards the bags. He fixes his stance and throws punches consecutively. He doesn’t stop, not when he is tired nor when his fists ache. He keeps going.

In his memories, he remembers when Dream introduces him to a boxing bag and chalk. He tells him to let go of the anger he holds before someone uses it against him.

But Tommy does not feel angry now. He feels nothing.

He continues until a voice from behind him interrupts.

“Theseus.”

It is Technoblade.

Tommy does not stop, however.

“Theseus,” he repeats. “What are you doing?”

Tommy delivers one last punch, and his arms fall. Between breaths he says, “What does it look like I’m doing?”

“I think you should be asleep.”

Tommy ignores him. Techno sighs.

“So should you,” Tommy then says, and lands another punch, before he leans back, his arms resting on his knees. He waits and catches his breath before he stands to face the man. He wipes the sweat off his brow and pays attention to his surroundings.

“I’m guessing we’re both awake for the same reason, then,” Techno mutters. “Well, don’t stop since I’m here. Keep going.”

Tommy doesn’t want to anymore. He prepares to leave, but Techno grabs his shoulder before he can.

The touch is sudden and unexpected. Tommy grabs his arm and pulls it backward, his arm lowering to his belt. It’s Techno, his mind reminds him, and he drops his arms and freezes.

Techno stills as well. “Theseus—”

“Shut up,” He grumbles. “Shut the fuck up.”

“I get we’re on speaking terms now,” Techno tells him. “But there’s no need to swear.”

Tommy’s prepared to curse him out. But that’s a Tommy thing and not a Theseus thing.

So, he quietens.

“Okay then,” Techno notices his silence. “You should go to bed.”

“No,” Tommy denies.

“Fuck, then at least get out of here. It’s not good to overtrain yourself.” Tommy knows a lot about overtraining. But he’s so used to pushing his body past his limit, that his muscles are used to being driven into pain.

Tommy stares blankly at Techno and Techno pulls his arm out towards the door. “Here, are you hungry? I’ll make you something.”

Tommy doesn’t want food from him. He’d rather just find Tubbo.

“You don’t have to say yes,” Techno sighs. “You have a choice.”

Tommy’s eyes edge into Techno’s. “Fine.”

“Fine, what?”

Tommy frowns and Techno gets an idea. He walks out of the room, Tommy trailing slowly behind. They arrive at the kitchen, and Tommy stares around.

“Don’t you guys have chefs?”

“No,” Techno doesn’t elaborate. “Sit in the dining hall. I’ll grab drinks.”

Tommy nods his head hesitantly.

When Techno returns, Tommy asks, “Don’t you hate the size of this place?” Tommy’s eyes graze

around the hall and high ceilings. On the ceiling, there are paintings of light and gods and goddesses with white robes. They blend into color.

“No,” Techno places a mug on the table and sits down. Tommy remains standing.

“It’s big.”

The older raises an eyebrow. “We don’t live here, Theseus.”

Tommy blinks. “You don’t?”

“Phil has a house. We’re only staying here because...”

Tommy gets it. “Oh.”

“Trust me,” Techno snorts. “I don’t particularly like the large size of this place. But with the agents we have, we need room.”

“Right.” They remain in silence and Tommy’s eyes leave the mug with a warm drink as its content.

“It won’t hurt you,” Techno notices. “It’s hot, though.”

Tommy nods his head slowly and bites the inside of his cheek. He regrets coming. He should have stayed behind. He should have looked for Tubbo.

“I’m not good at this,” Techno says. “Not like Wilbur is.”

“What?”

“You don’t trust me,” Technoblade shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t blame you.”

Tommy is so sick of this conversation. He’s sick of opening up and admitting things. He’s sick of questions and—

“You don’t want to talk,” Techno reads his silence. “That’s fine then, we don’t have to.”

“We’ll sit in silence?” Tommy asks in question.

“No,” Techno shakes his head. “I have a better idea.” He stands and drags himself to the corner of the room. There is a large box, he opens. Tommy remembers noticing the thing on the first day here, he had not mentioned it though. Techno opens the box, and what remains is a record player.

“You can pick,” Techno offers but when Tommy doesn’t say anything, he mutters, “Okay then, I will.”

He sits back down as the music begins.

A slow song with no words, different from Wilbur’s in the car. Tommy notices how their similarity in that sense, that they will go to music when words cannot fill a conversation.

Tommy closes his eyes yet stays alert during the song. It is slow and soft, and he listens carefully.

The melody progresses and Tommy hears the violin between. And when it finishes, Techno rises. “Did you like it?” He nods his head. “I’ll put on another.”

As each song continues, Tommy finds his hands itching towards the mug on the table. As the last

song arrives, it is between his fingers and his palms are not cold.

Techno pulls the record player away wordlessly. “We can listen again, another time,” he promises. “If you have a nightmare, or if you’re awake.”

“Technoblade,” Tommy says before he leaves. “Uh, thanks?”

Techno leaves and Tommy finds Tubbo. He is in his room as he thinks he is, laying on the floor, with his phone in his hands.

“He’s weird,” Tommy says. “They all are.”

“Including me?”

“Sure.”

“Thanks,” Tubbo nods his head, sincerely, before laughing. “But nah man, that’s how he usually is. He’s always been like that.”

Tommy frowns. “And Wilbur?”

“And Wilbur,” Tubbo confirms. “They got into music after their, uh, brother disappeared. Well, they were already into it, but I think they take fifty instruments each. It’s impressive.”

“Did they tell you?” Tommy asks and Tubbo snorts.

“No, but I hear them.”

Techno plays music for Theseus to remember.

The boy’s eyes close and they open once the song finishes. He does not remember.

There is a record at the back of his player that he hesitates at. His fingers skim the cover, and he glances at the boy behind him – his brother, to see him watching the drink in front of him, unsure.

Phil tells him it will take time. For him to open up, for him to take his mask off. For him to be comfortable and feel comfortable. He opens up to Tubbo, and he speaks to Wilbur – it’s progress. But Technoblade has never been good with emotion or words, so he hopes that one day, Theseus can understand him through music.

Tommy has many dreams.

He tells Dream once, of the faces. His past haunts him through the faces of the people he has killed. Whether they were his first kill or his last, they were present. With whispers and white eyes, they cry and wail and ask him why he is alive when they are not.

When Tommy is Theseus, he tells George, and only George, of one of his dreams.

("I'm in the white room," Theseus tells George when darkness looms and the night consists of city lights and bloody hands. "And I can't leave.")

"In your dream..." George is hesitant. Perhaps because he is interested, or maybe because he is not used to speaking of topics as such. "Did you try?"

"I did," Theseus says. "But I can't leave. I'm stuck.")

The dream is metal cuffs trapping him in a void room without escape. No one finds him, he is simply forgotten.

Tommy also dreams of death.

He dreams of falling. He dreams of his blood on his fingers and his brothers' blood on his skin.

Once, Tommy dreams of George. It is only once when he dreams of what is left of his older brother between the crumbling academy and the ashes that remain.

Although Tommy does not sleep for a while until Dream makes him. He must take the sleeping pills, and the night he speaks to Techno, he does. He takes them.

And he dreams.

Not of the faces, or the white room, or the brother he will never see again. He dreams of his family.

The brothers of his breaths, and his parents that he sees when he drowns.

He sees them.

They are blurs and smudges, but they are there. He can feel then, he can almost *touch*.

He wakes up every morning, to Dream's calls. "Theseus?" Dream asks. "Did you sleep?"

And every morning, he remembers that Dream will call him to make sure he has slept. He will know otherwise. "It's just me," he responds groggily and rubs his eyes. "What's the fuckin' time?" He mutters and licks his dry lips.

"Tommy," Dream says slowly and says his name because no one else is around and he is alone. "It's eight."

Tommy blinks.

"Eight?" his voice stumbles.

"Yeah."

(They wake up at six sharp because they are programmed as they arrive when they are of the age of ten.

Months after Tommy and Dream escape, they still awake at the same time every morning.)

And for the first time, Tommy wakes up later.

“Fuck,” Tommy mutters, then.

Dream stays silent. “I’m proud of you, kid,” he says, after, almost quiet. “It might be because of your lack of sleep, though. But I’m still proud.”

Tommy does not tell him of his dreams, or the fact that he urges his body to stay with his unconsciousness longer than he wants to, with the hope of *something* out of his grasp. He simply thanks Dream and tells him that he will see him soon. He attempts to fall asleep after, but he cannot.

He takes the pills earlier the next few nights, so he can sleep longer and so he can see his family again. So, he can see something more. Curiosity carves into his skull and a desire to know more eats him alive.

One night, Tommy returns to the white room. Only, he is not cuffed with metal chains that claw into his skin and make his skin red. Instead, he sits in the middle and a song plays.

A familiar melody, a melody he knows.

He hums the song under his breath, recalling the notes. He cannot figure out why he knows, or how he does, because it is so unrecognizable at the same time.

Tommy is stuck in the white room with the music. But this time, he stays.

Chapter End Notes

my aphantasia really did not help for the second half of this chapter. i blame it for whenever i update late because it's hard to write ughh

thanks for reading

#dogdaysao3 on twitter or tumblr so i can read your predictions and things :)

@pathicsoul on twitter

enough self promo see you guys in a week or so

(btw 'part 2' is almost coming to an end soon. 'part 3' is my favorite)

Listen

Chapter Summary

“Theseus,” his dreams sing. “Tommy.”

The melody is louder.

Tommy has never felt so close to his past, and so far from his future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Punz wakes up and Purpled is gone.

He stumbles between each room, shoving each door open, before scrambling to the next. His fingers shake as he flickers each light switch, leaving the light on as he finds the next door to open. He’s tight on money to pay for electricity, but Punz couldn’t give two shits now.

“Purpled?” He shouts when the rooms are empty. His voice breaks. “*Gray?*”

Silence looms and Punz slumps on a chair, burying his head in his arms as he controls his breaths.

He shouldn’t have left Purpled alone. He should have stayed awake – he should have kept an eye on him. Punz had decided to sleep the night after he had almost collapsed in exhaustion the night before. And now it had backfired because Purpled is gone for a second time.

Tears stain his eyes, and his breaths are ragged as he pushes his arm into his pockets to find his cigarettes. He swears when he realizes they’re not in here, even if he had gone to sleep with the pair of sweatpants he usually wears.

Punz stumbles up and grips the table to control his dizzy mind. He waits a second – then another and proceeds to his room. His mind isn’t straight, and he can’t think well. He needs a smoke. He needs to figure something out.

Purpled couldn’t have gone far, he thinks to himself. If he had – there are always options. There is always Quackity, and he had gotten Purpled a phone, so many he can call him. His heart races and so does his mind, with possibilities of the whereabouts of his brother.

He just needs a smoke.

He shoves his wardrobe doors open and shoves his hands in the pockets of loose jeans and baggy pants. He remembers shoving the packet in somewhere – his mind is a mess to figure out where, though. He smells smoke –

Punz smells *smoke*.

His body turns fast, and he scans the room, noticing his open window. Punz jumps forward, pulling the lever open and shoving his head through.

He doesn't know whether his heart stops beating or if he starts shouting first. "What the *fuck*?"

Punz is fuming. Purpled lays on the roof, his head on his palms as he lays back. A cigarette plays between his lips, as his eyes are closed. He wears his purpled hoodie and if it weren't for his lips quirking a fraction upward, Punz would assume he is asleep.

"What?" Purpled opens an eye. "What d'ya want?"

Punz grits his teeth. "How the fuck did you get up there? You know what? – I don't give a shit, get down."

"Now?" Purpled smirks.

"Purpled," Punz fumes. And shoves the window fully open. "I'm not asking again."

His voice is threatening enough for Purpled to listen. As Punz stands back, his arms crossed on his chest and his face probably red, Purpled carefully crawls through the window, onto Punz's bed. He flickers his cigarette and places it between his thumb and middle finger, as he sits on Punz's bed.

"Put that out," Punz orders. Purpled rolls his eyes and does. He doesn't take a second, to blow up.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Punz shouts. "I told you, I told you Purpled – to stay indoors. And God do you choose to ignore this simple request. One request – *one*. And you couldn't fuckin' follow it?"

Purpled stares and Punz continues.

"And you're smoking? You took my cigarettes – which I didn't give you permission to by the way, and you're too young to smoke if you haven't realized yet," Punz breaths deeply. "Fucking hell. I can't deal with this today."

Purpled stares. "Okay, then."

"Okay, what?" Punz snaps.

"Hit me," Purpled offers. "Go ahead, it doesn't hurt anymore, really."

Punz stares. For a long time. Slowly, he speaks. "I'm not going to hit you, kid."

"What?" Purpled doesn't believe him. "You can't deal with me, and I don't listen. I've been waiting till you finally snapped."

"I'm not hitting you," Punz repeats, disgusted that his kid brother even thinks the thought. "*Fuck*."

Purpled blinks. "I don't understand."

"We don't do that here." Punz repeats, "We don't do that here."

"Then what?" Purpled asks and stands. Punz doesn't realize how tall he's gotten, until now. "I broke your rules, Punz. Your only rule."

"That wasn't my only—" Punz pauses and thinks his next words carefully. "Where are my cigarettes?"

Purpled tosses him the packet and Punz pockets them swiftly. "You're not smoking. You're a kid."

“I’m not a kid.”

“I don’t care,” Punz replies, with a frown. “Don’t smoke, it’s bad for you.”

Purpled furrows his eyebrows, but Punz is not finished. “Look, I don’t understand what The Academy did to you. I won’t pretend to understand, and I won’t ask you anything until you feel comfortable telling me. That doesn’t mean I don’t care, I do – but I’m not going to push you.”

“Punz,” Purpled groans. “Don’t start–”

“No,” Punz denies. “You need a reminder. You were my brother first, and you’ll be my priority. Here is different from The Academy. We do shit differently – we do shit normally. So don’t smoke, and don’t hang out on the roof, unless you tell me – I guess? How the fuck did you get up there in the first place?” Punz wants to know because he isn’t usually a heavy sleeper.

“I pull sleeping pills in your coffee,” Purpled admits, guiltily. “You looked like you needed sleep.”

“You fuck.”

Purpled laughs when he sees him not angry. “Dude, you looked tired as hell. I was helping you!”

Punz can’t be angry. Not when the kid admits to wanting him to sleep because he notices him tired. Not when he doesn’t leave, he doesn’t try and escape. It’s something – it’s progress.

Punz takes it.

“Okay, okay, just don’t do it again,” Punz tells him. “I’ll never hurt you, kid.”

“Okay Punz,” Purpled nods his head, and Punz sighs, loud.

“Let’s go get breakfast then. I’ll be growing grey hairs soon, at this rate.”

Gray learns to smoke.

For many reasons, really. There are a couple of older students who sell cigars when the Teachers aren’t watching, by the field, on the other side of the hall. They tell them they’re good and handy. They’re sold for food and extra things Purpled must take a while to gather.

Gray learns over time, that not only must he be the fastest and smartest, but he must fit into a character. One day – soon – when he Graduates, he will be forced to play a character they want him to play, for missions.

(“The strongest survive. Only the greatest.” they tell him. “If you aren’t what they want you to be, then consider yourself gone.”)

He must be quiet. And when they want him to be loud, he must be loud. And when they want him

to be something else – he will be something else.

Gray takes the cigarettes. He knows he's getting ripped off – they aren't worth what he gives.

But the smoke is familiar, the smell reminds him of something.

Gray learns later, that although he can be what The Academy wants him to be – he is never enough.

The strongest, and greatest survive.

Gray is not the strongest. So, Gray will not survive.

Tommy lays on white floors, his hands in his lap and his legs crossed.

He hears the melody. His lips part and his voice catches up.

He wakes up when his phone rings.

"Fuck off," he snaps, his eyes remaining closed. "Stop calling me."

"Good morning to you too," He can almost hear Dream's smile. *"Go get breakfast."*

"Why the fuck do you wake me up, anymore?" Tommy groans. "I'm sleeping, now."

"Go have breakfast. I'll be around this evening." Dream tells him before there is shouting in the distance. *"Sapnap says 'morning',"* he says after a heartbeat.

"Go fuck yourself," Tommy ends the call and tosses his phone on the floor. He shoves his face into his pillow, and groans when he knows he won't fall asleep. He can't take more pills either, otherwise, he'll stay asleep until the afternoon.

Tommy does consider the option for a moment, though. Although Tubbo and Wilbur are pestering him more, he doesn't believe the plan will go accordingly.

He forces himself out of bed, not long after. His eyes are still heavy, and his posture is slouched but he's not at The Academy anymore, so he doesn't have to fix himself. He passes a clock on the wall, but he has learned to stop being so startled at the late time, a couple of nights ago.

Tommy knows no one will be at the hall for breakfast. Agents and everyone usually file out after eight. He knows that there is a plate left for him every morning or taken to his doorstep if he doesn't show up, but Tommy's not hungry this morning.

So, he finds Tubbo, instead. The thing about Tubbo is that he doesn't have to find him. Tubbo is in his room, he never is not.

He swipes the card on the door, and the doors open for him. The brown-haired boy sits on his desk

chair, in front of his screens. He raises an arm when Tommy steps in. “Ranboo, can you grab me my phone? It’s somewhere on the shelf.”

“It’s Theseus,” he corrects him. Tubbo turns and blinks. “You need to get better at that.”

“Well, you refuse to teach me,” Tubbo turns in his chair. “Get me my phone, please?”

Tommy goes over to the shelf. He passes the boy his phone, instead of throwing it because he knows Tubbo isn’t as good as catching as he says he is. Tommy then slumps on the chair by him and readjusts his mask. “What are you doing?”

“Doing some shit for Phil,” Tubbo bites his tongue as his fingers scan the keyboard. “You know what I do, right?”

Tommy thinks. “Not really? I know you work in the tech part of it.”

Tubbo grins. “I’m a hacker.”

Tommy’s eyes widen a fraction, and he faintly recalls a memory of retaining this piece of information. Although he provides a reaction, not covering it up well. “Fuck, that’s cool.”

“Thanks,” Tubbo smirks. “I’ll teach you some time if you teach me that knife trick you do.”

Tubbo has seen him throw knives with his eyes closed. He’s been asking Tommy how to do it, since.

“Tubbo,” Tommy says slowly. “I know how to hack.”

(George teaches him. He tells him that he must be able to, because The Academy uses him for more missions, at an age younger than when Dream had started.

So, his capabilities must expand, and George teaches him the basics. Theseus is a fast learner and George teaches him more.)

“Fuck you,” Tubbo groans, slumping back in his spinning chair. “I had one thing over you – one.” He doesn’t seem truly angry, although Tommy would have mistaken his emotions a couple of months back, he knows Tubbo is only joking.

But Tubbo is wrong, Tommy doesn’t have much over him. Tubbo has a stable life and friends, and he goes to school, and a life free from murder and blood-stained hands and memories of people who have been killed by his own hand. Tubbo has much over him.

“How much do you know then?” Tubbo cracks his fingers and watches Tommy’s careful movements.

“Not much,” Tommy shrugs. Not much he remembers. Because he recalls coding to be difficult and he hasn’t used a computer in a while. “What do you do for Philza, exactly?”

Tubbo shrugs and thinks. “He gives me a list of names, and I’ll research them for him. Their name, their backgrounds, simple stuff to be honest. Other times, I’ll pinpoint areas and locations and hack into public cameras so he can have a better insight of what’s going on in the area.”

Tommy thinks carefully. He isn’t dumb – he knows that Tubbo has searched him, when is Tommy. It makes sense now that he figures it out. Because nothing would have popped up due to The Academy’s secrecy, leading to Wilbur’s queries and questions.

It almost makes him feel when he realizes Tubbo would have done such a thing. Friends trust each other, but Tommy knows he cannot blame Tubbo for being curious.

Tommy wants to know what they thought when they couldn't find anything on him. What they thought of him, who they thought he was.

"How do you get into public cameras?" Tommy then asks and Tubbo answers straight away. His lack of hesitancy and straightforward answers tells Tommy that he isn't lying, that he states the truth.

"Philza has a security camera company as a coverup for the public. So, he has them across the state and I'm able to connect to those and use them to direct to other locations that we don't have control with. Although he hasn't needed my help much recently since The Academy's location is reserved and closed off. It's far from anything – anyone."

Tommy knows. They do it because they are unseen and unheard of. Their grounds are large yet can be covered as a boys' boarding school in the countryside, for anyone who does pass. Their secrets lay between the stoned walls, where the students are taken into lives they will never escape from.

"You know," Tommy then says. "Philza probably doesn't want you telling me this."

Tubbo furrows his eyebrows. "Why not?"

Tommy had thought it was obvious. "He can't trust me, I'm not the most reliable."

"Well, you haven't done anything to seem, unreliable."

Tommy sighs. "When the mission is over, and I return to.... I don't think he'd want me knowing."

Tubbo squints his eyes and seems baffled. "You're going back? To Quackity?"

Words dry at the tip of Tommy's tongue. "I guess?"

"Oh."

"Oh," Tommy agrees, he had assumed the obviousness from his statement. He will not stay here. He will return to his brothers, and they feel free. Tommy then stands, assuming he should leave. He isn't sure what else to say. "I guess I should go,"

"You can stay,"

Tommy doesn't want to. "Maybe later today." He'll train and attempt to sleep again. If he can't, then he'll figure out something else to do with his time. Although Tommy knows it won't be such a problem to get more pills.

But Tommy hesitates, first. "Hey, Tubbo?"

"Theseus?" Tubbo coughs, uneasy.

"Philza said he found about me because my profile was presented to surrounding agencies," Tommy says. "Can you show me?"

Tubbo doesn't move his fingers. They twitch on his lap. "Uh?"

"Please?" Tommy then adds, "If you can?"

“I haven’t seen it,” Tubbo states. “Only Philza has.”

But Tubbo turns in his seat and clicks through a couple of files. Tommy slowly seats back down, steadying his shaking legs and his heart racing a fraction. Tubbo’s fingers scan and he pulls out a touch screen pad, pressing fast.

There are large documents that appear on the large screens. Then two pop up, that unblur slow until his face and information appear in front.

Tommy stares at Theseus.

Theseus stares at Theseus.

He is Theseus in the photograph, he is Theseus now.

Although, he doesn’t feel like his past self. He doesn’t feel as quiet and confirmed as he once was. He isn’t emotionless and uncaring.

He must pretend to be Theseus now, but maybe he is truly Tommy because he has changed.

“Theseus?” Tubbo calls him his name that has torn his meaning into pieces.

The photo is of Theseus with long brown curls and cold eyes. He has scars and does not look as he does now.

Tommy has seen it before. He needs to see it again.

“How old are you?” Tubbo questions, quiet. “In the picture?”

“I don’t know.” He does. He must be fifteen. He does not make it to sixteen at The Academy, he leaves before then. So, although George, Sapnap, and Dream will have photos in their database from age ten to sixteen, Tommy will miss a year.

He may only be a year older now, but Tommy hasn’t seen himself so young.

“Theseus...” Tubbo mutters. “Never mind, forget it.”

“Ask,” Tommy says. “Ask.” Because he knows what he will say.

Tubbo does and does not hold back. “Why do you wear a mask?”

Silence speaks.

“I see you,” Tubbo starts. “I see photos. So why do you wear one?”

“I’ve changed,” Tommy speaks. “I’m not the same person I was in those photos.”

“So?” Tubbo’s voice almost breaks. “Do you still not trust us? Do you still not trust me?”

“It’s hard to trust,” Tommy sighs. “I’ve lived a life when I’ve been taught against it.”

“I’m your friend,” Tubbo says. “So, what can I do? What can I do better?”

Tubbo isn’t Theseus’ friend.

But he is Tommy’s.

And although Tommy appreciates Tubbo now, when he was once with Tubbo before he wore the mask – Tubbo had not held back. He hadn't been so held back and hesitant. He didn't second guess his words and smile often. Tubbo was sarcastic and not overly nice.

Tommy tells Dream that Tubbo isn't a friend, but perhaps he does not want to accept it. He doesn't want to accept that he has another connection and another step to caring. To feeling.

"You don't have to do anything better," Tommy eventually states. "You don't have to do anything better."

"I don't understand," Tubbo desperately tries to.

"I have blond hair. It's shorter too," Tommy shrugs. "My bruises and scars are gone."

Tubbo is silent.

Maybe he knows, maybe he's known for a while.

Tommy doesn't know. Tommy doesn't care.

"I have a piercing and a long scar on my forehead." Tommy's eyes meet Tubbo's eyes, intently. "And I'm not so young."

"Theseus–"

Tommy grips his mask.

"Stop," Tubbo grips his shoulders, tight, and forces his fingers loose. "Fucking hell, dude. *Stop.*"

"Guys?" Ranboo appears between their eyes and speaks unsurely. "What's going on?"

Tubbo lets go of Tommy quickly, his chest rising and falling, and his eyes wide. Tommy stares back in silence.

"Uh, guys?" Ranboo repeats, slow.

"Nothin' Boo," Tubbo says, and Tommy notices his hands shake slightly. Maybe he realizes. "Nothing."

"Oh-kay," Ranboo replies. "What are you guys doing?"

Tommy stands. "I'll go now." He does not wait for permission or acknowledgment. Instead, he leaves for his bedroom, taking a detour towards the bathrooms by the training rooms that the agents use. There are large mirrors here, and he stares at his reflection, at his masked face and hollow eyes.

Tommy does not care. He pulls off his mask and his blond curls fall and bounce. He shakes his head and notices every small scar and bruise he has. He lifts his hair to notice the long one that travels across his forehead. When he lifts his arm sleeve, the straight scars from the experiment are shown, in thin patterns. He stares them down until his eyes roam to his legs, where he has stitches and more bruises littered on his skin. He sees himself as Theseus because it is who he once is. And he knows deep inside, he will never be again.

His mind is of an assassin. He is still hesitant and careful. His bruises and burns show a different life. Yet he feels and understands and believes – and is different. He is Tommy.

He pulls on his mask and returns to his room. Tommy takes the pills. And he sleeps.

“*Theseus*,” his dreams sing. “*Tommy*.”

The melody is louder.

Tommy has never felt so close to his past, and so far from his future.

Quackity watches the moon once again, a cigar between his lips and his eyes dipped closed. He speaks to it, as he usually does. “I’m a good listener, I’d like to think.”

Smoke surrounds and he flicks his cigar twice, it fits between his fingers carefully. “Karl speaks of many things, I listen well.” Then he thinks. “Sapnap, not so much. But Sapnap’s never been much of a talker.” Sapnap shares emotion, he does not share his words.

Although, recently, he is closed off. Quackity will deal with that soon – he pulls it to the side for the time being.

“I’m a good listener,” Quackity continues. “But I think I’ve done enough. Philza thinks he’ll control me with my past for longer, he thinks I’ll keep my mouth shut. That *fucker* – he always wants the upper hand.”

Philza controls Quackity because of his past and what he’s done before. Philza values loyalty and trust, he requires it. Quackity breaks anything between them, a while ago. Until what remains are harsh ties that cannot be cut due to strong ropes of vengeance and revenge.

Once, Quackity has a family. Philza takes them away from him before he is left with nothing.

(“You’ll mess with me again,” Philza says once. “And you’ll have more coming for you.”)

“If he touches Karl, I’ll rip him apart. I don’t think I’ll have to worry ‘bout Sap so much–” Perhaps, Quackity should return home. He either resorts to the place under the starry sky when he is drunk, high or hurt. There is no other reason for him to be here if he is not one of the following options.

“He touches anyone, and I’ll tear his life apart,” Quackity chuckles, his splutters turning to coughs. “He thinks I won’t. I will.”

Quackity remembers love and a family. He almost forgets.

So, he lays under the moon and tries to remember.

George feels love when he is sixteen.

The feeling is strong. What if he feels now, may be stronger.

Freedom guides his bones and pulls his head to the sky, where the clouds are loud, and the sun is seen without a stoned wall blocking the life around him.

He asks Sapnap once, how their first sunset, free will feel.

He wonders if he has an answer to give. Yet George is unsure how a feeling so loud between his bones can be described. Because George is free, and George does not have to go back. George does not have to do anything.

Once he is an assassin, now, he is no one.

He is not George whose life is worth hundreds of thousands. He is not on a mission for blood, and he is not under the control of The Academy. He does not have a title to his name and is not Graduate Two, who must perform to the standards of others around him. He must not be better and excel and succeed because of the testing that is done on him.

Instead, he walks through the streets as no one, and he is content with that. He watches life and for once, does not bring death upon it. He doesn't have to be George; he does not need to have a name either. He walks through streets with thick layered coats or sits at the back of coffee shops with his eyes low and his mind racing. Eventually, his shoulders learn to unhunch, and he begins to taste freedom with his coffee.

Time does not last, even if he will. He has The Academy to take down and his brothers to find.

Until then, he thinks, and he plans. He watches and waits. He trains and prepares. He cannot die, he cannot because he lives. So instead, he risks his life. He will put everything on the line, and if the world crumbles to save his family, then he will crumble along with it.

Chapter End Notes

hey all!

thanks for reading :) hope you enjoyed this chapter, was fun to write

#dogdaysao3 on twitter or tumblr so i can read theories or analyses

i love reading comments and the small notes in bookmarks, they're all so cool so thank you for leaving them!!

Family

Chapter Summary

In between hope and death, he wakes up within familiar arms of love and care.

Chapter Notes

uh hey? hope you guys are ready lmao

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

His name reminds him of pain and murder. Nights starving and daylight begging.

So, he goes by Purpled instead.

Dream stares the agents down carefully. His eyes scan each, raising his eyebrows when one flinches, or another cannot remain eye contact.

“I’ll be your instructor for the next couple of weeks,” He directs. “You can call me Dream.”

Quackity has given Dream a couple of classes to take for teaching. They will be trained and shaped once the mission begins. Dream has a lot of work to do. He starts with stretches, before demonstrations.

(He is reminded of a time when the faces staring back, were younger and innocent. They were children, they grow stronger over time. They learn to see the world, for what it truly is.)

Although now, the faces are mature and bold. They are older and are not forced into this position. They have seen the world and the cruelty that comes along with it. They understand – and that is the difference.

Sapnap comes in to assist. They show basic throws and punches, before improving the technique of agents by sparring.

(Dream does not have to hit and shout. He does not have to call the Teachers to come to collect the weaker students and out of line. He does not have to hold down a student if they speak back, as George hits his face.)

Here, he is bold, but he is not strict. He does not watch blood and empty faces struggle to survive. He congratulates students and will let out a small smile when one jokes – although that is all they will get from him. He will continue to be blank-faced and ensure they complete their necessary training but here, Dream does not have to be who he once is.

At the end of the lesson, many students leave for lunch or have a break. Some return and sit around him as they stretch.

“You were really from The Academy?” He is an older one, perhaps twenty or so. He shows interest when he fights and has good technique. The rest are slightly younger.

Dream nods his head slowly and their breaths are sharp.

“How was that like?”

“Strict,” Dream states and watches the interest on their faces. “Very strict.” They want more, so he gives it to them. “We learned how to fight and use weapons very early. Training and exercises were missions themselves, to survive.”

One asks, “How much training did you do?”

“All day,” Dream replies. “We trained all day for years. When I started doing missions, I had more breaks, but it was constant.”

“He – Sapnap, was at The Academy too?” The older boy asks, and Dream nods his head. “How did you guys meet?”

Dream smirks. “So many questions,” but he responds anyway. “I had finished my training when I met him. I had ‘graduated,’ so I wasn’t expected to go to classes anymore. I was an instructor for a couple of his, and we started talking.”

He does not explain the long process. He does not explain Sapnap being hesitant and how he saw potential in Sapnap to survive, unlike the other students in his class who were weaker and did not hold the passion he did. He speaks softer of the time, because no one will understand, and he will not make them.

Their questions continue. They ask about his technique, and he demonstrates a couple of his knife exercises. Some leave, others stay with questions. Dream for once will answer them because he does not mind.

“You weren’t meant to get close to people?” One student question. “But you got close to Sapnap, didn’t you?”

Words dry on Dream’s tongue. “Yeah,” he says and nods. “We did.”

The others must understand he will not elaborate. The same student questions, “Was it just you two?”

“No,” Another one denies. “I’ve seen another guy with Quackity.”

“Yeah,” Dream almost smiles. “That’s uh – Tommy.” My kid brother, he almost says until he remembers he isn’t.

“I’ve spoken to him before,” A boy who is a little younger than the other, speaks. “He threatened to stab me if I didn’t give him my knife.”

Dream rolls his eyes. “That’s him.” He does remember telling the boy not to speak to anyone he didn’t know at Nevadas, but he shouldn’t be surprised at his lack of listening.

“You guys escaped?”

“We did.” It had been Dream’s plan from the very beginning. Only it had not occurred because Sapnap and George stay behind, and George never makes it out. “And it difficult to, nothing easy. So, we’ll be taking them down, once and for all.”

The agents nod their heads. There are flames in their eyes.

“I’ll do as much as I can to help,” One student nods his head, and the others agree. “No one should have to live like that.” Dream blinks – he isn’t sure why they’re suddenly so eager.

“I agree,” Another student speaks. “I’ll try the hardest I can,”

“Me too,” Others agree.

Dream smiles.

It is another ordinary day, except it isn’t.

Gray hears rumors spreading.

“They’re taking some of us away,” They say. “There are too many of us.”

Gray ignores the rumors and continues training.

The rumors are right.

They line up in long rows, and Teachers, Instructors, and the Headmaster pass students one by one, watching them from head to toe. The occasion student must step forward and is led away by Teachers.

Gray hears the voices around him. “What are they doing? Where are they going?”

Others speak, “We didn’t do anything wrong,” And Gray attempts to fight the fear out of his eyes.

They go through students slowly. Gray’s eyes travel across the field, expecting to see Sapnap around. He is not present and his reassuring eyes do provide a sense of comfort as they usually would.

(Gray just wants to know what’s going on.)

They stop at a student a couple of rows down. Gray’s back is straight, and his eyes remain forward but he hears the screams of the student who struggles and is pushed to the ground. He is dragged

by a Teacher away and Gray gulps. He knows to cooperate, as do the rest of the students.

They soon stop in front of him. Gray does not break eye contact, nor does he flinch as the Headmaster stares into his soul.

He nods his head. Gray is taken away.

He is shoved into a truck, where the doors close behind him and he smells the sweat and fear of the other students.

“We won’t be coming back,” One student says, his words slurred and stutters. “We won’t be coming back.”

“Why not?” Another student asks, bolder.

“I overheard from other students that are too many of us. So, they need to get rid of us, weaker.”

“You’re lying!” The other accuses and a brawl commences. He does not hear their voices again.

The doors open a couple more times. More students are thrown in, but it is too dark to understand how many students have been collected. Gray sits in a corner, his arms around his legs, pressed up against his chest. He closes his eyes and takes a breath out. He knows he will survive. He has made it too far, not to.

He hears Sapnap in one ear. *Be strong*, he says softly.

One of the last students is pulled in, when they are given the answers, they desperately want but are afraid to ask. “We’ll be taken somewhere and then they’ll leave. We’ll have to survive on our own, after that.”

“We can do it,” Another says. “We can, right?”

“Shut up,” One growls and Gray attempts to block out the noise. “We don’t have any fucking food or water. We older ones are controlled and trained, but we won’t last much longer than the younger ones.”

“We can’t give up,” A quiet voice speaks amid the silence. Because they have made it far, they have to survive,

But the strongest survive and they are not enough so they don’t.

The truck lurks forward one moment, and students stumble into others. The ones with balance stay still and sit down. It is a mixture of life and death and everything in-between as they wait. Gray keeps his eyes closed and presses his palms together. He breathes and he makes sure he does not forget his voice and the voice of Sapnap, to tell him that everything will be alright.

(“Persistence is a virtue,” Sapnap states. “Without it, you are nothing.”)

It is hours before the truck stops. They are cuffed to one another and soon all Gray can feel is ashes and rocks. The truck lurks forward, and some students stumble forward, only taking a couple of steps forward before they stop in their tracks, between the rocks and the sun, and realize that life is pointless.

They don’t take long to take off the cuffs. Once they do, some leave. The majority stay put.

Sapnap would have told Gray to go – to find. That nothing is limited, and that there was hope

somewhere. They are abandoned in rock and desert, but there has to be someone willing to assist.

Yet, Purple sits and sleeps. Among the other students who have lost hope of survival, he joins them and waits for death.

He is woken up with rough arms that pull his face and hair. “Wake up,” the voice says. “It’s not time to leave, yet.”

Gray is groggy and disorientated. He hasn’t felt like so, in a while. The sand stains his hair and his stomach is empty.

The face is recognizable yet unfamiliar. “Someone caught a wild bird. You’re one of the only asleep – so I wanted to save you some.”

“What?” Gray grumbles and sits up.

“D’ya want some?” The boy shoves meat in his face. “It’s not cooked too right. We couldn’t work with much.”

Gray watches it oddly. “Why don’t you have it yourself?” Because it’s all for themselves, they do not share, nor do they help each other. It is something to understand at The Academy – that you prioritize your own survival over any other person. It isn’t selfish. It is simply wanting to live.

The boy shrugs. “We’re all going to die anyway.”

Gray takes it. He eats slow.

“You’re a good agent,” the boy says. “I’m surprised you’re here.”

Gray shrugs his shoulders.

“You’re thirteen?” The boy questions and Gray nods his head. “I’m fourteen, that’s cool.”

It is not. Gray will be thirteen and the other will be fourteen when they die. They will not make it past now, they will never be able to live on. Death has always been so close, but now they almost taste it within their dry tongues and sore throats.

“Most of them went to get food,” the boy points to the others who sit a bit away. “Those don’t talk.”

Gray doesn’t blame them. He finishes his meat, and his stomach is almost satisfied. He ends up laying on the rocks and watches the sky for a final time. He hopes to be alone, but the boy won’t leave him alone. Gray does not want the company, not so close to death.

“We accepted our fate a long time ago,” the boy speaks again and Gray listens, as his eyes close. “We accept it but here we are, fearing it.”

“I don’t think we accepted it,” his voice is quiet. “I think understood it – we never accepted it, though.”

They lay with that thought for a long time.

The boys who look for food do not return. The sun grows hot before it grows cold, and the moon settles over.

“Did you have anyone close?” the boy asks.

“Hm?” Gray turns his head.

“Did you have anyone close?” he repeats.

“I do,” He had Sapnap. “What about you?”

“Not really,” he yawns. “If I did, they didn’t survive, and I can’t remember. You stop remembering their names, after a while, don’t you? At some point, we stop asking for each other’s names.”

He is right because Gray has not asked for his name, and he has not asked for Gray’s.

What is worth knowing one more name before death? What is worth knowing one name if death approaches and the name will be forever gone?

“I had Sapnap,” Gray says after some time of thought. “He’s a Graduate.”

“I know Sapnap.” They all know Sapnap. “He took a couple of my classes. Wasn’t so nice.”

“He can’t be.”

“I know, I know,” he sighs. “How’s he like?”

Gray smirks. He can say a lot of things. “Persistent,” he ends up saying. “Wouldn’t be happy that I accepted this so quick.”

“Can he blame you?” the boy snorts. “I took a walk. We’re surrounded by nothing.”

Sapnap would have still told him to *try*. To survive. To hold that desire above everyone else.

“I wonder if he knew,” Gray sighs. “If he knew this was happening.”

“Likely not,” the boy denies. “The Graduates would have been against it. They listen to the Teachers, but they’ll be against what they do. I’m sure they didn’t.” Maybe he knows, or maybe he says this to give Gray a piece of mind before his death. Gray appreciates it, nevertheless.

“How much time do you think we have left?”

He shrugs. “If I’m being honest, I’m not so sure.”

They don’t speak after that. The boy sleeps and Gray watches over him. When he is awake, they watch the sky and wait for something – anything. Perhaps hope, perhaps death.

(Perhaps both because death was the only hope they have left.)

He watches over Gray when he is asleep too. It’s an unspoken agreement.

Students who stand up to leave do not return. Some promise food, but their faces aren’t seen again.

It is night four when they get hungry. “I think it’s my turn to look,” the boy sighs. “I’m the oldest here.” There are students in another group. They are all thirteen and younger.

“There’s no point,” Gray shrugs.

“Maybe there isn’t,” he stands anyway. “I’ve been here for long enough, though.”

Gray almost asks for him to stay. But the words burn the tip of his tongue.

As the boy leaves, Gray stops him. "Wait!"

"What?"

"I never got to know your name." Gray wants to know. He will remember it, he promises himself. He will.

"I told you," he says, though. "I don't ask anymore."

"Okay," Gray resigns.

"Your eyes are purple," the boy remarks. "I've never seen eyes like yours. I just... I've wanted to say that."

Gray laughs. His last laugh. "Okay,"

"Purpled," the boy smiles. "That's your name." He leaves.

He does not return.

"Purpled," Gray tests the name between his teeth as the sun rises above the rocky land. He likes it and keeps the name. He wonders if the boy would have ever told him his.

(He wonders if the circumstances were different if they'd ever be friends.

He hopes so.)

It is not long later when Gray slips. When the world goes back.

He falls asleep with a smile and a reminder of those before him. In between hope and death, he dreams of a wonderful life.

In between hope and death, he wakes up within familiar arms of love and care.

"Theseus,"

Tommy's eyes open and he lifts his head from his cushion.

“I’m outside. Put your mask on.”

Tommy does not hesitate, shoving the mask on, with a wish he is asleep again. Wilbur waits for a second more, before barreling inside his room.

(Tommy had forgotten to lock it, between tiredness and fatigue.)

“You sleep too much,” Wilbur stops in his tracks, his eyebrows almost raising off his forehead.

“What?” Tommy grumbles, wanting to know the reason he is awoken at such a time. He grabs his phone from the side table – it’s almost six. He’s been asleep for too long.

Tommy turns back to Wilbur who still watches.

“What?” Tommy repeats slowly.

“Your hair,” he says quietly. “It’s blond,”

Tommy does not put his mask on. He checks his reflection from the blackness of his phone screen and sighs quietly to himself as his curls have escaped his mask, peeking through. They refuse to stay put and spring out.

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters. “I dyed it.”

Wilbur stares. For a very long time. He eventually asks, “why?”

Tommy shrugs. “I’m not the same person I once was.” Wilbur understands partially, Tommy sees in his eyes. He steps closer and speaks quietly.

“I get that. I don’t understand what you’ve been through – but I understand changing to separate yourself from the past.”

Tommy nods his head and stares away.

“You sleep too much,” Wilbur then announces. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Tommy responds. He does not mention the sleeping pills (Phil has probably already told Wilbur, anyway) or the dreams. He will not tell Wilbur, he might tell Dream next time he sees him, though.

“Do you want to eat?” Wilbur asks.

“I’m tired. I think I’ll sleep.”

Wilbur frowns. “Get up, we’ll do something.”

“Wilbur–”

“I’m not going to stop pestering you, let’s go.”

Tommy groans and Wilbur leads the way.

He leaves the hallway away from his rooms, and the elevator they take is not the one to the training rooms or dining hall.

“Where are we going?” Tommy frowns.

“To our house,” Wilbur quickly interrupts his previous sentence. “I mean, Phil, Techno, and mine.”

“Aren’t you twenty-five?”

Wilbur grumbles, “Fuck off,” Tommy almost chuckles.

They go to the parking lot, and Wilbur’s car is almost familiar. “Are you getting in?” Wilbur rolls the window down when Tommy does not step inside.

“Why are we going?”

“I’ll show you something. I got Phil’s permission this time, don’t worry about that.” Tommy isn’t worried about that. He hesitates at the car door handle, and after a moment’s thought, he pulls the door open and sits down.

Wilbur turns the music on as they drive. He sings under his breath and Tommy almost compliments his voice – he doesn’t though. Instead, he basks the sun and the warmth and watches the passing trees and homes with a wonder.

He remembers going to their house and watching *Up* with Tubbo. He almost remembers feeling something for the first time in a while. It stands strong, as it had all those weeks ago. There is another car parked though, and Tommy notices how the nature seems less lively. Winter approaches.

“Techno’s home too,” Wilbur says and watches his reaction to the room, rather too carefully. When he doesn’t say anything, Wilbur leads him inside. Tommy knows where the exits are, due to his memory, but he can’t help it as he double-takes every room and maps out the home in his brain to pinpoint every detail of the household.

“The backdoor is open. There are three doors to get into the backyard, by the dining room.”

Tommy blinks and wraps his arms around himself. “Uh, thanks.”

“No problem, we’re going upstairs.” They pass familiar hallways and the photos that Tommy glimpses over. He sees the young boy from Wilbur’s past before he must look away to the room that Wilbur steps into. It isn’t his bedroom or any other room. It’s a studio, and music instruments row across the walls and shelves.

Wilbur grabs a guitar. “This is a guitar.”

“I know what that is, prick.”

He strums the guitar strings with a smile. “I go here when I need to think to myself. Techno comes in here too, we used to play a lot.” He uses past tense, so Tommy guesses they do not anymore.

The similarity between Techno and Wilbur: is their music.

“Chose an instrument,” Wilbur speaks up, laying the guitar down. “Any, I don’t mind.”

Tommy looks at each, uncomfortably. They look delicate and expensive.

“That one,” He points at the one he is less likely to break. Tommy is rough, he’ll break a smaller instrument he thinks.

“The piano,” Wilbur smirks. “Nice choice.”

Wilbur lets Tommy sit down and try the notes out. "I'll teach you each—"

"I'm a fast learner," Tommy promises.

"It's difficult, Theseus," Wilbur laughs. "You won't get everything so easily."

Tommy didn't get knife-throwing easily. So, he adapted. He didn't have much of an appetite, but he learned to eat more and train his stomach. He had to learn how to murder pretty fast too.

(Murder is fast. One moment, you are a normal person. A second after death, you are a murderer.)

Wilbur teaches each of the keys and their sounds. Tommy is right, he gets it pretty fast. As he tests each note, Wilbur takes out his guitar and strums chords lightly. He closes his eyes and hums light, under his breath.

"Do you write songs?"

"Yeah," Wilbur says.

"Techno showed me some of his."

"Yeah, he told me."

Tommy nods his head unsure.

"I'll play a song before we leave," Wilbur then offers. "Or I can teach you more piano."

Tommy doesn't mind listening. He sits on the floor, leaning against the wall as Wilbur sits on a stool, repositioning the instrument on his lap. He begins by tapping the guitar and his words are smooth and rough.

Tommy never gets the time to appreciate music as it is never brought upon them. He recalls faint radios and soft voices as George had introduced him to German and Swedish bands to improve his accent. He listens to more now, than he has ever before.

Wilbur's song continues. Tommy listens carefully, holding only each word and syllable and note of the song.

Wilbur ends the song soon, "*How's it feel? How's it feel to be so loved, yet so alone?*"

Tommy freezes. Wilbur strums and lifts his head to gauge his reaction. "Did you like it?" And Tommy nods his head, standing up. A rush of fatigue has hit him, maybe to do with the music.

Wilbur is not as keen as Tommy to leave. "Theseus—"

Tommy snaps his head to him. His mind pounds, and he feels something inside of him erupt.

"Can I play one more?"

"I'm tired, Wilbur," Tommy replies.

"It'll be quick," There is a flash in his eyes, something warm and daring.

"Okay, then,"

Wilbur starts.

The song begins and Tommy's eyes fly open.

Wilbur hums as the song progresses and Tommy's heart stops.

He knows the song.

The familiarity is bone crushing, and he cannot look away. Wilbur continues, and Tommy feels it all at once.

Whispers of previous faces and a life before this. Tommy remembers.

And Tommy can't breathe.

Because that song means *something* to him and is in his memories – and no one else knows it but himself. He has not even told Dream or Sapnap. Yet Wilbur knows, and Tommy fights to admit the truth.

Tommy can't *breathe*.

"Theseus?" Wilbur snaps his head at him. "What's wrong?"

Tommy closes his eyes and clings to the carpet under him. He is helpless and his mind urges him to say something, to speak. But he cannot utter any words, as his throat closes and his mouth stays shut. His heart pounds through his ears, and he feels nothing and everything all at once. Reality screams at him with a sudden epiphany.

"Theseus?" Wilbur comes next to him. "You need to breathe, Theseus. You're having a panic attack. Can you hear me?"

Tommy panics. It is not irregular, and he has dealt with this feeling for his whole life. A horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach threatens to escape when he is in a horrible or unsafe condition.

"I can't breathe," Tommy says once and over and over again. He needs Dream. "I need him."

"Listen to my breaths, Theseus," Wilbur says, and he feels close. Too close, Tommy needs him to move away. But he can't do that, the words can't escape his lips as his heart hurts and his mind breaks. The song in his mind quickens, he hears it between Wilbur's soft words and the melody he recalls.

"I need my brother," Tommy gasps and struggles for any air. "I need him."

Dream helps. Dream knows what to do when he feels like this – on the brink of death itself.

The walls cave in, it is hot, and his skin burns with the touch of air. And Tommy needs Dream.

"Theseus," Wilbur says softly. "I'm here."

Tommy can't hear him. His eyes stay closed and there is a whistle in his soul that screams.

"I need Dream," Tommy says, or maybe he doesn't. His heart almost jumps out of his chest when he opens his mouth again, for his hoarse voice struggles to be heard. "I need XD–"

Fatigue and tiredness rush him. He does not remember falling asleep, he does not remember waking up.

"Tommy," the voice is soft, near. "Can you hear me?"

Tommy's heart stops. "Dream?"

"I'm here, I'm here," Dream gives him distance, yet is close enough for comfort. Tommy's eyes stay squeezed shut and he presses against the wall behind his back. "Breathe for me."

"I'm trying," Tommy stutters. "I can't."

"Try," Dream sounds as if he struggles to stay sane. "Listen to me kid,"

Tommy feels hot and sweaty. He pulls his arm up to tug his mask, but his fingers graze his cheek.

Tommy's fly open, and the room feels small. "My mask—"

"I took it off," Dream tells him carefully, hesitating between each word. "You passed out, kid."

"They're here—"

"It's okay," Dream reassures him. "Copy my breathing."

Tommy does, after struggling to come to terms with Dream's revelation. He ignores it, for his heart to steady and feel okay again.

He slumps back when he is in control again. His head hits the wall, and his damp curls fall.

"Tommy," Dream sits beside him. "Don't do that," He forces Tommy to sit properly, so his head doesn't dig into the hard surface. "Tell me what happened."

Tommy tells him. "I heard it, Dream. The song."

"What song?"

He controls himself before anything happens again. But it's difficult to state more. "A song."

"Tommy?"

"Yeah?"

"It'll be okay," Dream promises.

"You don't get it," Tommy sighs. "I remember that fuckin' song."

Dream freezes.

"I remember it from my past – I can *hear* it." Tommy hears it in his soul. He hears it when he sleeps.

"So, what does it mean?"

"I don't want to know," Tommy thinks of Wilbur and then the brother he dreams of. The brother he thinks he will never see again because his past is gone and when he arrives at The Academy, he will never get it back.

"I want to go home," Tommy then declares. "I want to go home, Dream."

"We can do that."

Dream stands and helps him up. "Uh, Tommy?"

“They know who I am, don’t they?”

Dream does not need to answer for him to know the answer. He can almost see the betrayal on their faces. They’ll ask him why he is untruthful, why he didn’t tell them. Tommy doesn’t know.

They leave the room slowly.

Wilbur is in the living room, with Technoblade. Their heads snap to them, and maybe they stare a little longer, in case they cannot believe it themselves.

“Tommy,” Wilbur mutters, simply.

“He’s going home,” Dream instructs. “Back to Quackity’s. I’ll inform Phil.”

“He knows,” Wilbur says. “But he can stay.” He hopes.

Dream shakes his head. “Thanks,” and that’s all he can say before they leave.

Tommy hears the song somewhere.

Louder and faster, it continues.

Each note accompanies a flash and a face.

(A mother, a father, and two brothers.

A family.)

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading :)

(comment and i’ll add the tag karl/george maybe cause they deserve their moment if you know what im talking about)

Fugitive

Chapter Summary

“Say you missed me,” Sapnap repeats.

“Sapnap,” Dream huffs.

“I’ll fucking kill you,” Tommy threatens. “Don’t think I won’t.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They stare silently.

“Headmaster,” he asks them. “What will we do now?”

Their highest agents are gone.

Graduate One. *Fugitive*.

Graduate Two. Initially presumed deceased. *Fugitive*.

Graduate Three. *Presumed deceased*.

“Was a body found?”

“No, but—”

“Silence,” They turn to watch him strictly. “Do not speak over me. A body was not found, there will not be any assumptions until it is.”

“They are our best,” he says quietly. “Our collaborations and bidders are stepping back, we need to do something—”

“They *were* the best,” The Headmaster glares. “Not anymore.”

“Pardon?—”

“They have weakness,” The Headmaster frowns. They turn around, to the window where their agents surround the floors. They train and fight and mend the damaged agency that the Graduates have broken. “They hold a connection. They are weak because of it.” They stare for longer, analyzing each student carefully. None of them will achieve greatness as the three before them. “So, we will take it away.”

“No one has come forward with the bounty.” He responds. “Sixteen is not found.”

“We will find him,” The Headmaster sneers. “We will. And we’ll kill him.”

He understands. They will kill the Graduates' only weakness, so they are strong again.

“Even better,” The Headmaster smirks. “They will kill him, themselves.”

They will finally complete their final mission. The Graduates will kill Sixteen because The Headmaster denies imperfections.

He nods his head and apologizes. “Sorry for wasting your time. Thank you.” He leaves.

The Headmaster smiles.

The stars are bright.

George wonders.

Tommy sees Wilbur in his dreams.

He has his guitar out and plays the familiar song. Technoblade is with him and performs the violin.

Philza is with them. As well as another figure that he cannot recognize.

Tommy wakes up in sweat and fatigue. His heart beats against his chest, and he clings to the bedsheet, his fingers curling into fists as he regains reality.

Dream is by him in a moment. “Breathe, kid.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy groans and tips his head back as the faces carve into his skull. They won’t leave even alone, even if he desperately pleads them to. “Fuck off, Dream.”

“No,” he refuses. He holds his shoulder, “Are you okay?”

“Give me a second,” Tommy’s vision unblurs and the faces aren’t as vivid. “Okay, I’m fine, I’m fine.”

Dream continues staring as he regains his senses, processing his surroundings and the room that surrounds him. He is at the Syndicate. This room is smaller and has large windows. There is a painting in the corner and a bag laying on the floor.

“What the fuck?” Tommy whispers, squinting around. “I’m not there?”

“You’re not,” Dream confirms but does not say more.

Tommy snaps his head to the older. “How did you get in here so quickly?”

Dream doesn’t respond, Tommy realizes.

(When they start moving around after escaping The Academy, Dream does not sleep. Instead, he rests by Tommy’s floor, sometimes on the chair or the edge of the bed)

Tommy wakes up one day, to see Dream’s presence, his eyes closed and his back against the wall.

He goes to sleep and does not bring it up after.)

“It’s one in the afternoon,” Dream determines. “You’ve slept a lot; do you want to get up?”

Tommy doesn’t want to. He’d rather lay in bed and stare at the ceiling with a thoughtless mind. Yet he hasn’t seen Sapnap in a while and he feels his stomach stir. So, he nods his head and follows Dream out of the room.

“I’ll make lunch,” Dream says and Tommy slumps on the kitchen stools. He misses the feeling of familiarity and a place he feels comfortable in. He does not have to constantly look over his back or keep the mask on. He isn’t second-guessing his words or changing the way he acts to fit into what he is.

They stay silent as Dream navigates around the kitchen and Tommy daydreams. They’re both out of it, after the events before. But Tommy appreciates the silence for what it is because it’s not uncomfortable nor is it awkward.

But the silence is broken when arms wrap around Tommy from behind, and Sapnap makes his presence known. “Tommy!”

Tommy flinches as Sapnap wraps arms around him and tightly holds. “Holy shit, I’m going to go deaf.”

“Say you missed me,”

“Well, I didn’t, prick.”

Sapnap doesn’t let go and Tommy struggles to pry his arms off. He feels weaker, he doesn’t like it. It’s likely due to the exhaustion and lack of food. Tommy doesn’t like feeling weak.

“Let go,” Tommy gives up after struggling for a few moments more.

“Say you missed me,” Sapnap repeats.

“Sapnap,” Dream huffs.

“I’ll fucking kill you,” Tommy threatens. “Don’t think I won’t.”

Dream rolls his eyes. “Tommy.”

Tommy widens his eyes as Sapnap laughs loudly. “Tell him to let go! You can’t be on his side!”

“Sapnap, let him go.” Sapnap does, not before ruffling his hair for Tommy to slap his arm away. He slumps on the chair next to him.

“What’cha making, Big D?”

“Don’t call me that,” Dream grumbles as Tommy snorts. “I’m making Tommy lunch. You just ate.”

Sapnap rubs his stomach and leans backwards, resting the back of his head on his palms. “I’ve been training for a couple of hours, I’m starving.”

“Fine,” Dream grumbles. He grabs a pot, and fills it with hot water, placing it on the stove. He dumps a packet of pasta in afterward and takes out the vegetables.

Sapnap leaps off the stool to help him out.

“I can tell help,” Tommy offers, and Sapnap and Dream look up at him.

“No,” they say in sync.

Tommy frowns as Sapnap smirks. “Dream told me what happened the last time you held a kitchen knife.” He laughs.

“Sapnap,” Dream mutters and tosses him a tomato. “Be quiet.”

Tommy takes the knife out of his boot to sharpen it. He considers throwing it at Sapnap, but Sapnap glares at him with a look that says *‘don’t you dare’* so he doesn’t. Instead, he gets off the stool, to lay on the couch until they are finished. Tommy considered turning on the TV, but he decides to go to sleep instead.

As soon as he closes his eyes, he opens them again when a figure hovers over him. “You’re sleeping again?” Dream comments with a frown. “You were sleeping a lot when you were at the Syndicate’s as well.”

“So?” Tommy rolls his eyes. “So what?”

“I’ve just noticed,” Dream hums. “You didn’t use to sleep this much.”

Tommy groans. “Fuck off.”

Dream frowns and returns to the kitchen.

Tommy falls asleep and wakes up again when Dream announces the pasta is already. They sit around the dining table, and for the first time in a long time, Tommy does not feel hesitant about eating. His shoulders are not hunched, and he is not alert when Sapnap and Dream are with him. They eat, and Sapnap carries the conversation, Tommy interrupting from time to time.

He won’t admit aloud he misses this. Sapnap will make fun of him, and Dream will give him that expression he usually does, so Tommy doesn’t.

“You know?” Dream then pipes up. “I think I know why you might be tired, it’s probably the pills.”

“What pills?” Sapnap asks.

“Philza gave him medication because he couldn’t sleep,” Sapnap looks over at Tommy. “And remember the last time he took anything? It didn’t turn out too well.”

“That makes sense,” Sapnap shrugs and Tommy rolls his eyes because Sapnap will agree with

anything Dream says. “So, what do we do?” Sapnap asks with a mouth full of food.

“I’m fine,” Tommy sighs. “I’ll just sleep it off.”

“I told you,” Sapnap whispers in his ear, leaning over. Sapnap and he sit beside each other, Dream sits opposite, watching them whisper with an eyebrow raised curiously. “That Dream’s the only one that stops the nightmares. You can’t sleep well if he isn’t here.”

Tommy’s cheeks heat and he shoves Sapnap away. He would have had crashed off the chair if Tommy had more energy.

Apparently, Dream notices that too. “Are you not feeling well?”

“I’m fine.”

His older brothers exchange a glance.

Dream sighs. “If you stop taking them, I guess the tiredness will go and you won’t need to sleep so much.”

“What did happen the last time you took anything?” Sapnap asks Tommy.

Tommy doesn’t have to think about it because the day is engraved in his memory. He had been fifteen or so and had contracted a bad flu from one of his classmates. Training in the rain and swimming periods didn’t help and Dream had given him medicine to deal with his fatigue and swollen throat.

Tommy had ended up fainting in the middle of class – only George was taking. Tommy had been punished, but George had somehow managed to reduce the punishment, somehow.

Dream grimaces, likely unhappy with recalling the memory. “I gave the kid medicine and he fainted in class.”

Sapnap glances at Tommy, who chuckles uneasily. He recalls his burning fingers and sore back from the punishments. “I blame Dream,” Tommy says.

Dream frowns. “Yeah. I did pardon you through my classes, though.”

Tommy recalls. Dream had felt bad so through his lessons for the next week, he didn’t go too hard on him. Which was a lot, considering Dream’s nature and the extent of the punishments Dream would receive if he had been caught.

“Damn,” Sapnap leans back. “I wonder why you react so bad.”

Tommy has a clue. Dream understands the look on his face and freezes.

“What?” Sapnap asks.

“The testing,” Tommy mumbles. “Probably screwed me over, with what they were putting into me.”

Sapnap shuts his mouth shut tightly, and Dream’s eyes flicker. “I can’t wait to get revenge,” Sapnap says, after the momentary silence.

Dream is against revenge. Well, he used to be. “Me too.”

There are flames seen in Sapnap's eyes. "I'll burn them to the ground for a second time." Tommy chuckles after.

Dream stands with his plate once they have all finished. Tommy hasn't felt so full in a long time. "We have to go to Quackity's office, he needs to speak to us."

"All of us, or just him?" Tommy jabs a finger at Sapnap. He ducks when Sapnap swings at him.

"No," Dream rolls his eyes and pulls dirty-blond hair out of his eyes. "He needs to speak to us."

They leave not long afterward, Dream throwing a coat in Tommy's direction, and snatching his jack jacket from Sapnap. Sapnap and Tommy manage to get into a fight, and Dream steals the knife off him and tells him to stop flickering it around. Tommy hasn't felt so at *home* in a while.

He realizes, as he walks by his brothers – that the Syndicate was once his home. He does not remember it, nor will he ever – but once the walls were familiar and the dining room was a usual place to be in. Once he had his own room and called Wilbur his brother.

Tommy had once so desperately wanted to know the people behind the faces. He had stayed up thinking of a family of before.

Now he wants to forget. He wants Dream and Sapnap to be his brothers and he doesn't want Philza to push him back.

"Tommy?" Sapnap nudges him. "You zoned out."

"Oh," They step into the elevator. "Sorry,"

"Are you okay?" Sapnap questions, unsure.

He's just thinking. He's okay.

"Yeah," Tommy nods his head.

"You don't have to go back," Sapnap promises with determination. "You can stay, Quackity will figure something out."

"They'll want me to go back." Why wouldn't they? It makes sense why they had been so adamant about his staying, and why they had cared so much – and worried. Phil was always watching him, and Techno had changed the way he treated him, from when he was just *Tommy*. Wilbur was too close for comfort and treated him carefully.

It makes sense, as Tommy pieces everything together. Their lost brother who was stolen at ten. The oddly familiar pictures of the young boy.

(Tommy realizes that it is him in those photos. That it is *him*.)

He also realizes that it is Philza who gives him away. Philza who results him becoming an assassin of The Academy.

"Tommy?" Sapnap repeats. "You good?"

"I don't have to go back," Tommy's hands form into fists. "I don't,"

Dream places a light hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry," he breathes. "You don't."

They leave the apartment building and don't take long to arrive at the main *Las Nevadas* building. The elevator ride is slow, as they wait to arrive at the highest floor.

Punz stands in front of Quackity's door as they approach.

"Punz," Dream greets, who nods his head.

"He's inside," Punz confirms, and his eyes flicker to Sapnap. He smirks, "So is Karl."

"Thanks, Punz," Sapnap rolls his eyes, and the bodyguard opens the door, following them inside. Quackity sits back in his seat, but he doesn't have his legs on the desk as he usually does. Instead, he sits up straight, speaking to Karl and Antfrost who stand by him. Slime is already here.

"Hello, Dream!" Slime greets, Quackity and Karl ending their conversation for their eyes to look over. "And Sapnap. And Tommy, from...—"

"Hey Slime," Tommy interrupts his hesitation.

"Tommy," Quackity grins then, "It's good to see you kid,"

"You too, Big Q,"

Dream gets into business straight away. "Quackity, are there any updates on the weapons?"

"They're expected to arrive in two weeks. The ammunition in a week."

Dream nods. "We'll go ahead in two weeks, then?"

"There might be a problem," Quackity sighs. "Philza."

Sapnap and Dream exchanged glances. Tommy stiffens.

"I'm unsure if we can still trust him," Quackity tells them. "He won't trust us, especially since we're refusing to comply with his requests of giving Tommy back."

"He's not going back," Dream spits.

"I've told him," Quackity mutters. Sapnap walks over to Karl, and whispers in his ear. "Dream, he wants The Academy to pay. All of them."

"We've gone through this Quackity," Dream growls. "We'll abandon our alliance as he won't know of the reallocation of the agency. It gives us enough time, to coordinate our own plan."

"You don't understand," Quackity stands. "He knows."

Dream blinks. Sapnap's head whips to Quackity, startled. "What?!"

"He knows," Quackity sneers. "He found out."

"How?" Is Tommy's voice. "How did he?"

"That's what I want to know,"

"Someone told him," Antfrost announces. "One of us told him."

"Don't blame anyone here, Antfrost," Quackity glares.

“If anyone, it’s you,” Sapnap accuses, pointing at Ant. “You have a connection to Awesam. You have every opportunity to tell him.”

“I haven’t,” Antfrost glares. “I haven’t told him anything.”

“Then how do they know?” Sapnap raises his eyebrows. “Because no one fucking knows, other than us.”

“Sapnap.” Quackity and Karl say his name at the same time, and Sapnap immediately quietens. Tommy would have laughed if it weren’t for the circumstances. Sapnap’s boyfriends are the only people who can make him quiet.

“We won’t point fingers,” Quackity looks around. “Until we know for sure.”

“We can’t accuse anyone,” Karl agrees. “There’s no reason to, anyway.”

They understand the nature of the situation. Sapnap, Dream, and Tommy’s eyes bear the burden and pain of their past, and they all understand that. They all also understand that there are children, and teenagers there, that will endure the punishments and training to this day. They are not guilty; they do not deserve more.

Philza does not. Philza does not understand the pain they all undergo, to survive.

“We’ll continue training,” Quackity then states. “Dream, I need you to lead more classes—” Tommy turns to Dream, who avoids his eyes. “Sapnap too. Antfrost, I’ll need your assistance with guarding Nevadas. We’ll need more guards and enforcement.” Antfrost nods his head. “And Slime, stick behind – we’ll attempt negotiations with other agencies. I didn’t want to get to this point, but it’s what we’ll have to do.”

“Other agencies?” Dream raises his eyebrows.

“I have a couple of connections, they’re good people, Dream.”

“For your sake, I hope they are.”

“Tommy?” Quackity asks, and Tommy looks up at him. “I wouldn’t mind if you wanted to help Dream, and Sapnap with training. If you don’t mind.”

“Uh,” Tommy goes breathless. “I, um...”

“Thanks, Quackity,” Dream interrupts, quickly. “Is there anything you wanted?”

“No,” Quackity pulls his drawer and takes out a cigarette and a lighter. “Punz, stay for a moment as well.”

Dream and Sapnap leave with Slime and Antfrost. Tommy hesitates, looking back at Quackity.

“Philza wants to take down The Academy....” Tommy stumbles on his words. “You said that he doesn’t agree with what they do,”

“Tommy,” Quackity says softly.

“You told me because he doesn’t agree with that they do,” Tommy tells him, looking into his scarred eyes. “What’s the real reason?”

Quackity sighs. “His wife was killed by them. He’s wanted revenge since.”

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “That doesn’t make sense.” Because he gave Tommy up to The Academy. Why would he if he *despised* them so much? “He gave me up to them – why would he–”

“Tommy,” Punz interrupts with hard eyes and hard words. “He didn’t give you up,”

“Punz,” Quackity grits his teeth in the guard’s direction. He is surprised because Punz doesn’t usually talk and remains silent.

“Tommy?” Dream returns into the room, questioning why Tommy hadn’t followed him out of the office with Sapnap. “What are you doing?” When no one speaks, he speaks louder. “What did you tell him, Quackity?”

“I didn’t tell him anything,” Quackity scoffs.

“Tommy?”

“Is that why Philza is attacking The Academy?” Tommy realizes. “Because of me?”

Tommy realizes. He is taken. Philza wants revenge for his wife – and his *son*. Him.

“Yeah,” Quackity responds.

Tommy nods his head and glances away. “Okay.” He leaves the room, Dream behind him.

“Tommy?” His brother asks softly. “Hey, look at me.”

Tommy shakes his head as they push the doors open. “You knew he was my father.”

“I did,” Dream nods. “I had read the files–”

“You didn’t tell me.”

Dream speaks. “You didn’t want me to tell you. You told me that you’d ask me when you were ready.” Dream is right, he is never wrong.

Philza wants revenge because of the death of his wife and his lost son – he who was taken. He is taking them down in revenge, because he cares for his son, and will destroy those who had destroyed his family.

Philza does not get his son back. Because his son is not Theseus, his son is Tommy who is different.

Tommy’s chest tightens, and his breaths quicken. Dream grabs his shoulders quickly, and his words are instant. “Tommy? You need to stop thinking about it, or you’re going to have a panic attack.”

Tommy panics. “Phil wanted his son back, Dream. I can’t be his son, I’m not Theseus anymore. He’s probably... he’s been looking for Theseus for so long, but I can’t be him.”

“You don’t need to,” Dream persists. “Hey kid, listen to me. Stop thinking about it, breathe.”

“But–” Tommy closes his eyes. “I can’t be him, Dream. I can’t be Theseus, I’m so different and I can’t fucking remember.” Wilbur misses his younger brother. He won’t get him back. Nor with Techno. And Philza won’t have the son he’s been searching for, for so long.

Dream tries to calm him down. But Tommy panics and he can't control the dread and feeling that erupts.

He can't be Theseus. He isn't Theseus, anymore. He is Tommy, he can't be Philza's son or Techno and Wilbur's brother.

Arms of familiarity wrap around him. Dream, who is a part of him, *Dream* who is his brother. He can be Dream's brother because Dream understands that he was once Theseus and how he is now Tommy.

Tommy calms and rests between the arms of his brother.

They celebrate Purpled's fourteenth birthday.

Purpled tells him that they do not celebrate birthdays at The Academy and that there are no celebrations because they are never told of their birthdays. All they know is that each passing year, they are another year older.

Punz must inform him that he has in fact had a celebration before, although Purpled cannot remember them.

"Your ninth birthday," Punz remembers clearly, with a soft smile. "You wanted to go to the beach, and we went surfing. You built sandcastles until the sunset."

Purpled frowns, "I can't remember."

"That's fine," Punz responds. "What do you want to do this year?" He remembers a year ago when his younger brother was found. And although Purpled is not the same as he once was, they are getting better. Purpled opens up and Punz can sleep without too much of a worry.

Although there are things that do not change. Purpled's apprehensiveness, and his assassin roots rearing him back into his past. He still falls asleep with a knife under his cushion and looks out for exits whenever they enter a building.

"I'm not so sure,"

They end up ordering pizza and each on the couch as they watch movies. Purpled will always pick it apart and Punz will always have to ask Purpled to put his knife down when he tries to recreate any knife tricks that play. Which is why they tend to avoid action and murder.

(Murder isn't a good option, they avoid horrors and murder mysteries as much as possible.)

Purpled always translates different languages, when Punz doesn't understand. "How many do you know?" Punz asks through a mouthful.

"I don't know." Purpled shrugs. "More than fifty maybe. I can't count them all because I'll pick it

up in a conversation.”

Punz appreciates the time they have. There are worse nights when Purpled lashes out or throws a knife around in frustration.

“I just want to remember!” Purpled shouts. “I can’t be who I was, because I can’t remember, Punz!”

“I don’t need you to remember,”

“Yes, you do!” Purpled continues. “I can’t be your brother when I’m so different from who I once was.”)

The worse days become rarer, though. Purpled speaks stories of the past, ones he keeps hidden for a while.

“I’m Purpled because I don’t want to be Gray,” He says. “Gray is different, and I’m not him anymore.”)

Punz makes sure after that, to refrain from slipping up. Even if the name *Gray* will leave his lips from time to time, his brother is now Purpled.

Purpled is almost sixteen when they move to California.

“I have a job, Purpled,” Punz tells him on their drive away from their small apartment and city views. “I’ve been putting it off for too long.”

“You haven’t ever had a job,” Purpled frowns.

“I do, but I’ve put it off.” He explains that Quackity his boss, and the agency he works at as an assassin. When the words leave his mouth, Purpled freezes and clings to his seatbelt. “No, no, I don’t work for him anymore. And neither with you.”

“Why not?” Purpled asks quietly. “Won’t he want me?” Punz learns that The Academy students are used around and bided before. Because they are of greatness and greatness is used.

“No, he doesn’t know about you,” Punz tells him. “Not really. I’ll be working as his bodyguard. He pays a fuck-ton.”

“Oh,”

“You can go to school, if you’d like,” Punz offers. He knows Purpled knows fifty different languages and excels in subjects. But it is a taste of freedom and teenagehood that he never gets to experience. He will be able to form friendships and speak to others. “Only if you want to. You do complain that I’m the only person you talk to.”

“I don’t complain that much,”

“Yes, you fucking do.”

Purpled speaks after a second, “Okay,” He murmurs. “I’ll go to school.”

Punz smiles.

“I don’t know,” Purpled then says. “How to be a proper teenager.”

“That’s okay,” Punz shrugs. “You weren’t normal before, either,”

Purpled shoves him, and Punz swears the car swerves. “Don’t hit the driver!”

“Fuck you,” Purpled swears, making Punz laugh.

“Give me a story,” Their drive is slow and quiet, and they will soon arrive at the airport. Purpled asks for a story, as he usually does when he is tired and curious. Punz gives him a story of their past, one he cannot remember.

Punz thinks, turning to his brother at a red light. “Hm,”

“Nothing embarrassing. I’d like to keep those forgotten.”

“You used to surf a lot,” Punz says lightly. “I bought you a surfboard for your eighth birthday and you kept it in your room, and it took a while for me to convince you not to carry it everywhere. It was a funny sight since you used to be so short.”

“You suck.”

Punz grins, and he drives again at the green light. “You entered your first competition a couple of months in, and you were up against kids double your size. But you pulled through and won.”

“Really?” Purpled raises his eyebrows, stifling in another yawn.

“Yeah,” Punz smiles, proud. “You got a trophy too. I still have it.”

Purpled’s lip’s part. “You still have it?” his voice is incredibly small and Punz almost sees his ten-year-old brother sit by him again. He could choke up because Purpled is so big now. He’s almost sixteen and Punz can’t believe it, remembering the days when the kid was ten and he was sixteen and they were against the world.

Purpled is moments away from sleep when he speaks again. “Thanks, Punz,”

“What, kid?”

“We were told that our families gave us up,” Purpled murmurs between unconsciousness. “And that they didn’t want us anymore. I-I’m glad you’re my brother.”

When Purpled goes to sleep, Punz cries.

Chapter End Notes

HEY GUYS

thanks for reading

appreciate the comments they're amazing :)

(i changed my username for the last time i promise ;P)

also random note im super excited for MCC the teams are so good
im watching green, which pov/team are you guys watching?

Cocky

Chapter Summary

“This is Tommy,” Now all eyes are on him, but Tommy does not cower. As he is once taught, he keeps his back straight and head forward. “I expect you all to listen to him, as you do with me. He’s good with knives, better than me so I’d rely on him for any questions.”

Dream pauses. “He’s my brother,” and then he adds, “Ignore him if he threatens you with, well, anything.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy is Wilbur’s brother.

Tommy is *Theseus*.

“Wilbur,” Techno snaps. “Wilbur.”

“What?” Wilbur’s eyes cannot look away from the floor. Not when everything comes together, not when his mind forms the pieces into one and he finally understands. Because Tommy shares the same eyes as Theseus did, and they are both hesitant and second guess their surroundings.

They are the same person, and Wilbur finally understands.

He asks Tubbo to check their cameras situated around the town at Tommy’s disappearance. Tommy one day stops communication and his apartment is empty. Dream is gone too; it is almost as if they are never there in the first place. Wilbur asks himself through previous nights if Tommy is real, to begin with.

Tubbo does not get any updates from the cameras. But then Wilbur takes Theseus to their house, and wonders if his brother will remember the melody their mother once sang.

He does remember, Wilbur supposes. Theseus passes out and Wilbur calls XD.

Theseus is Tommy and XD is Dream.

Technoblade never gets close to Tommy. Wilbur does. He remembers banter and child movies. He remembers the arcade and Tommy buying two plastic guns because he refused to buy any other piece of plastic. For a second, Wilbur sees Theseus in Tommy, because Tommy is like a sibling to him, and almost what Theseus couldn’t be.

“Wilbur,” Techno repeats and Wilbur glances up at his older brother. His face remains passive and cold. Wilbur knows better. Wilbur knows he crumbles. “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“I don’t know what I’m thinking,” Wilbur responds with hollowness and truth.

“I didn’t think we’d ever get Theseus back,” Techno says. “It doesn’t feel real.”

It doesn't feel *right*, Wilbur almost says aloud. They do not have Theseus, because he is Tommy and Tommy does not want them. He has a family – he has Dream.

Wilbur wants his brother back.

He recalls when he sleeps, of a younger boy with bright eyes and brown hair.

When he wakes up, his mind flashes to a boy with empty eyes and blond curls.

“I want to know why he couldn't tell us,” Wilbur says softly when Techno enters his room as they both cannot sleep when the moon hangs in the air. “I want to know.”

“Trust?” Technoblade offers. “He couldn't trust us; we were the Syndicate to him.” Wilbur had hoped to be more than just the *Syndicate*. Wilbur and Tommy had talked and opened up. They had confessed to struggles and Wilbur made a promise that he'd introduce him to every movie he knew.

(Wilbur watches Dream and Tommy with jealousy. Dream has a younger brother and Wilbur can only dream of one.)

“Phil will talk to Quackity,” Techno starts. “He'll figure something out, he's Philza after all.”

“What will he figure out? There's nothing to *figure out*,” Wilbur grits his teeth and stares at the wall.

“Quackity is playing with Philza. He knows he won't back out of the alliance now that we know the truth of Theseus.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur corrects softly because that is his name.

Technoblade raises an eyebrow. “He'll be back again, Quackity's games won't work this game. He'll use the kid against us because he's been searching for our weakness for so long and now, he has one. We can't offer to back out of the alliance at this point in time.”

Techno continues, “He also should know we want to take down The Academy as much as he does.”

The Academy steals the lives of their mother and their younger brother.

Their mother, deceased, and their brother who will never have a childhood because he is taken away and forced to be an assassin. He is forced through grueling processes and his mind is wired to act and behave differently. The conditioning and brainwashing to be someone he isn't.

Wilbur almost cries. Technoblade is in the room though, and Wilbur refuses to cry in front of him.

The Academy takes away their years with their mother and brother. They take away Theseus – Tommy's first memories of life and replace them with teachings and recollections of punishment.

“We'll get Theseus back,” Techno promises. “Quackity cannot continue doing this.”

“You don't understand, Techno,” Wilbur closes his eyes. “Tommy has Dream – he has a family now,”

“That doesn't–”

“You haven't seen them,” Wilbur shakes his head. “Not as I did. Tommy relies on Dream; they

understand each other more than anyone else. Dream would do anything for him—”

“And so would we,” Technoblade interrupts with a frown.

“—and Tommy would do anything for *him*.” Wilbur finishes and Techno closes his mouth.

“Dream’s witnessed his life. He’s witnessed him grow up. And we can say we have, but we haven’t. Tommy isn’t Theseus anymore.”

Techno huffs. “I don’t understand you, Wilbur. Quackity has no right to use him against us.”

“He doesn’t, but we have no right to take Tommy away from his family.”

Techno leaves. Probably to talk to Phil. He was always closer with their father, anyway.

Wilbur sits on the floor. He looks up at the ceiling and rubs his cheeks until they are red and hurt. He feels young again, as he had laid on the floor with tears and ache, when his brother does not come back. When Philza tells them the news that their brother is taken and won’t be returning home until he is found. Wilbur feels young again, but maybe he still is.

Yet loss and hurt have aged him. Losing the people he loves the most, losing the people who matter.

He has still lost Theseus. Theseus will not return, he will remain as the little boy in his memories, with loud shrieks and a large fascination with the world and everything around.

Tommy returns instead. He is sixteen but his memories and life say otherwise. His lost ten years and the other six as an assassin, leave him cold and skeptical, with reluctance and unwillingness to form any form of friendship.

Wilbur leans on the bedframe. He allows his memories to take him away.

“Theseus?” Wilbur laughs. “Turn around!”

Theseus turns fast. “Wilbur?”

“Smile!”

Theseus smiles. He slaps his hands on his eyes at the loud sound and bright light. “*Oww*,”

“Look, Theseus,”

“Wilbur,” The nine-year-old complains, dramatically. “My *eyes*,”

Wilbur rolls his eyes, and nudges the boy, turning the screen for him. Theseus’ eyes widen and his bright blue eyes fixate on the image in front. “That’s me,”

“It is,” Wilbur chuckles and ruffles the boy’s brown curls until the boy complains again.

“Take another, Wilbur, please!”

On Wilbur’s desk, there are pictures. Some hang by his walls and above his bed. The ones he keeps close are the ones of Theseus.

Over time, his memory fades and he begins to forget the sound of the kid’s laughter and the sight of his smile. So, he keeps the photos closer so he will never forget.

(He hopes that Theseus won’t forget of him either.)

Tommy hears Dream’s voice.

“Today we’ll begin with weapon training. I want to see technique and good form. Sapnap will be here soon, too. If we finish quickly today, we’ll move onto weapon spars.”

Tommy hears more voices and students shuffling around the room. He stays behind the door, contemplating stepping inside.

(“You don’t have to join,” Dream reassures. “If you don’t want to. But don’t stay inside all day, you can train with Sapnap if you want.”)

Tommy ditches training with Sapnap. Sapnap is too busy watching Karl from the other side of the room, and if he needs a fighting partner, he can always use Antfrost. Which is how Tommy finds himself by Dream’s class as his mind has a battle with him, about whether he should enter the room or not.

He recalls training with Dream at The Academy. Dream is stoned-faced and hits when they slack or do not pay attention. He uses Tommy as a demonstration sometimes, and his classmates and Instructors watch as Dream flips him over and slaps him when Tommy does not perform the technique to what is expected.

“Tommy,” a voice makes him jump, which shouldn’t since he should be aware of his surroundings and sudden movements. But there is no one around. It ends up being Dream, who steps into the hallway.

Tommy blinks, caught.

“If you were trying to hide, then you didn’t do a good job,” Dream smirks. “I could hear you breathing from outside.”

Tommy’s mouth feels dry and there is something lodged in his throat. He steps around Dream, to leave, but the older grabs his shoulder, rearing him back. “Where are you going? I thought you were staying.”

“I can’t,” Tommy chokes out and gazes away.

Dream goes silent. “Tommy,” he then says. “You trust me.”

“I do,” Tommy confirms.

“I did it because I had to,” Dream stares into his eyes. “You know that,”

“Yeah,”

“I’d never hurt you,” Dream continues. “Nor would Sapnap. And if anyone does, we wouldn’t let them. Nor would you.”

Tommy ends up nodding his head.

“I’m going over some exercises, I’d appreciate your help. You always did say you were better than me with knives.”

Tommy bites the inside of his mouth. “I don’t know if I can.”

Dream presses his lips together. “I’d never hurt you,” he repeats.

But you did, Tommy thinks. Although he knows inside of him that it is unfair for him to think so. Dream had no choice, otherwise, he would face the repercussions of not being strict enough and being stripped away from his role as a classroom teacher if he was not impartial with all his students. Dream *had* to hurt him. He had no choice.

Tommy knows it was not a choice. Yet he still hesitates.

“Tommy,” Dream sighs and presses his eyes closed. He takes a deep breath in as if he’s trying to control himself from lashing out.

“I’m sorry—” Tommy stumbles on his words. “I know I should be teaching with you, I know.”

“I’m not angry,” Dream reassures. “I’ve been getting angry recently. I’m not angry with you, but I’m, um, trying to control it.”

“Angry?” Tommy raises his eyebrows, unsure if he is hearing correctly as Dream is known as the calm and collected one. Sapnap is the spitfire who uses his anger to dominate his opponents.

“Yeah,” Dream chuckles, but his eyes flash. “I have changed. I don’t know if it’s a good thing but since I did punch a wall through the apartment wall that one time, I’ve felt more on edge.”

“It’s a good thing,” Tommy nods his head. “Maybe not the hole thing. But the changing.” Tommy does see it in Dream’s eyes now, that he refuses to have weakness, and if anger is one of them, then he wants to let go of it. They can’t have emotion, not when emotion is uncontrollable, and assassins must be stable and regulated.

Dream continues, “We both are changing, huh?”

“Yeah,”

“And that includes now,” He places a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, lightly. For him to know that he can step back and have space if he wants. “I’m not bound by the teaching techniques I was before, Toms. And I don’t want to force you to go in there with me, but you need to know that *that* will never happen again.”

“Okay,” Tommy says. “Okay.”

Dream smiles and steps back, treading back into the training room. He keeps the door open, and Tommy has the choice to come inside, or not.

Choice; it’s unfamiliar yet comforting. Once, Tommy is denied choices. Yet now, he is free with them.

He decides to join Dream, who stands by other students correcting their technique with the weapons. When Tommy steps inside, many students glance his way. Others whisper.

Dream nods his head in Tommy’s direction when he turns. “Everyone! Attention here for a moment!”

Tommy glares, Dream pretends to ignore him.

“This is Tommy,” Now all eyes are on him, but Tommy does not cower. As he is once taught, he keeps his back straight and head forward. “I expect you all to listen to him, as you do with me. He’s good with knives, better than me so I’d rely on him for any questions.”

Dream pauses. “He’s my brother,” and then he adds, “Ignore him if he threatens you with, well, anything.”

The class laughs. Tommy is not used to the sound of laughter whilst training. Nor smiling faces and for Dream to be joking around. He is right. They are changing.

Although Tommy’s mind is not on the brother comment – his mind sticks with his previous one. Because Dream compliments his knife skills, and his heart has never felt so whole before. Dream is the best; he is The Academy’s first prodigy. Their Graduate One. And Dream compliments *him*.

Tommy’s eyes edge to Dream, and he does not look away. Dream feels his eyes on him, and watches Tommy, his smile gone but his eyes knowing. Tommy hopes he knows how much it means for him. And for him to know what the comment does to him.

“Uh, Tommy?” A student says his name, with a questioning edge to his tone. “Do you think you can help with my technique? Tommy nods his head in response, and it takes him a while to warm up to the class. He may not admit it, but he is on edge and looking over his shoulder to Dream. Dream helps his students and guides their arms. Although he does shout, it is not aggressive and threatening.

Although when Tommy does warm-up, he isn’t afraid to show off his skills.

“You’re good,” Guy says. Tommy learns he is nineteen. “When did you start knife throwing?”

Tommy thinks. He ends up shrugging his shoulders. “I can’t remember. A while ago,”

Guy spins a knife between his fingers. "I've been learning for a while. Do you want to compete?"

"I hope you're not a sore loser," Tommy shouldn't be so cocky, after all, his Teachers once teach him against it. (But he is.)

Guy has three knives. His skill is good, but he only gets two bullseyes. Tommy gets three.

"Next time," Tommy grins. "That will be your eye,"

"Tommy," Dream appears by him, suddenly. "Stop threatening my students."

"I wasn't threatening him," Tommy rolls his eyes, but Dream knows better. When Dream turns his back on them, Guy speaks to Tommy.

"I'm confused, I thought you weren't allowed to have siblings at The Academy?"

Tommy pauses. He does not allow emotion to settle across his features. "How do you know that?"

"My friend told me," Guy's words are slow as if he remembers he should not have admitted the words out loud. "He was, uh, from there too."

"The Academy?"

"Yeah," Guy pauses with regret and scratches the back of his head. "He was."

"What's his name?" Tommy then questions and picks up the knife from the floor. The metal glimmers under the light of the room.

"Purpled."

Tommy does not recall a student named Purpled.

He recalls many students. Although his memories reflect their numbers with their faces as students do not usually share their names around. They know of each other's numbers, as they wear them on their clothing, wrist, and stomach.

(Tommy has the number sixteen imprinted into him. Sixteen on his wrist, sixteen on his back. It is a part of him that will never change, a part that will remain in the past forever.)

"Do you know his number?" Tommy then questions and Guy responds with a frown.

"No, I don't, sorry."

At the end of training, Dream and Tommy roll up the mats and stretch. They do combat for a bit, although Tommy prefers to watch instead of attend any demonstrations. Maybe next lesson, Dream understands.

As they wipe their sweat and clean up the hall, Tommy asks the older. "Do you remember a student called Purpled?"

"No," Dream raises an eyebrow. "Why?" He tosses a water bottle to Tommy after taking a long sip.

Tommy unscrews the cap. "Guy, the person I was talking to said he knows a student from there."

"What?" Dream furrows his eyebrows. "The Academy?"

“Yeah,” Tommy recites their conversation, word by word from recollection.

Dream’s frown deepens. “That doesn’t make sense. No student escaped before us.” They are the first. No student dares before them. If they have, then they are found and killed. They usually do not make it past the walls though. “Unless he did, after us.”

“I assumed he was an old friend. Guy mentioned him as if they’ve known each other for a while.”

“Did Guy know his number?”

“No,”

Dream’s eyes crinkle in confusion. “No, Tommy that doesn’t make sense. If Purpled had escaped, I would have recognized his higher ability beforehand. His name should be recognizable.” Dream lingers. “Although there is something about his name that feels...”

“Maybe he changed it?”

“Maybe,” Dream stands after they finish, and the room is spotless. “Let’s go then.”

“Where?”

“We’ll talk to Quackity,” Dream responds. “Because there’s a chance that Purpled is an assassin here, and Quackity knows who he is.”

And if he is, Dream does not add but Tommy knows what his brother thinks in his mind. Then he has some explaining to do about why he didn’t tell us.

Theseus looks up to George.

Because although Theseus wants to be as skillful and fast as Dream, and as good as fighting as Sapnap, he admires George’s intelligence and wise words. Dream teaches Theseus everything he can to survive, and Sapnap gives him motivation and reasoning to push through lessons and exercises, but there is a part of George that Theseus wants to be.

George does not care and is blanked-faced. He remains silent and ensures no opponent can use anything against him. George is the assassin that Theseus wants to be.

When they are on missions, Theseus admires him from afar. George’s kills are clean and the weapons dance on his fingertips as he carves an ‘A’ into the thick skin of their victims. The only smile on his face is a simple smirk, but it vanishes fast as George is not cocky.

Theseus desires to impress him. He trains harder, improves his technique, and watches George’s face as he catches knives and weapons that are thrown his way. Yet, George stays still and passive. So, it is Theseus’ mission that he does not tell another soul, to impress the older.

It takes three years.

They undergo a mission, where they are taken to a smaller town in Australia, where the dirt is orange and so is the sky. Dream is initially chosen to go with George, but Theseus goes instead after Dream is on the other side of the world for a mission.

The plane there is silent, as George stares blankly out the window, as he focuses on his element. Theseus keeps his eyes closed until George gives another rundown.

“We’ll stay for three days, maximum. We have to befriend the locals and find the location of John Andy Smith. He will seem like any other person there, but before we finish anything – we’ll have to find what he’s hiding.” Smith hides money. A lot of it. George states the location four times. “In his shed. They require all of it. Then we will kill him.”

Theseus nods his head.

“Do you understand?”

“I do,” Theseus nods his head and continues when George waits. “George, I understand.”

George watches his blue eyes and turns away.

Western Australia is hot and sandy when they land. They take a car to their residence for the next couple of days and are abandoned by the Instructors that had George a phone and more technology to assist their mission. There is a reason why they do not give it to Theseus because George is valued and trusted more than he is.

Their house is small, but they cope. They do not waste time, changing into suitable clothing, and keeping protective wear under their jeans and shirts. George throws Tommy a hat, and they head to the town square afterward.

They are treated with friendliness as newcomers. George is Wayne and Theseus is Justin. They mold into their roles and pick up on the accents quickly. They are brothers from the city, and their story is that they move to the town for calmness and to start afresh.

“This town isn’t so calm,” Oliver, an old man in his late forties, laughs with a golden grin. He sits in the pub with a beer in his left hand and his phone in his right. He is friendly enough to carry on a conversation. George orders a beer to blend in, and Theseus sticks with water. “Quite the opposite, actually,”

His wife Jan, swats him with a tablecloth playfully. She runs the pub and George and Tommy exchange glances, holding a knowing that they will receive the most information from them. “Oli, don’t try and scare them off already. They just got here, for goodness sakes,”

“I’m not wrong, Jan,” Oliver laughs and downs the rest of his beer with a gulp. “Keep away from the west, they’ll do you no good.”

“Why so?” George smiles easily. It is convincing, Tommy knows that his emotion is not doubtable to an untrained eye. “We heard about a family before coming here, the Smiths? Were told to stay away,”

“Whoever told you, was right,” Oliver leans forward, nodding. “The Smith’s are no good, it’s best to stay away. If you’re looking for calmness, stay away from them for good.”

“Why?” Theseus asks, curiously. His interest can go excused for the character he plays.

“I shouldn’t tell you this,” Oliver mutters. “But the Smith’s have connections with the wrong

people. They export all sorts of goods across.” Oliver tells them to not get into trouble, and that he has to depart. George and Tommy discuss under their breaths, so no one in the bar hears of their plan.

“Tomorrow,” George states. “Today, we’ll understand his schedule. We’ll have to figure out how to get around his property and get him out of his home, so we are not caught. According to Oliver, he lives alone and his family lives in homes nearby, so we only have to worry about him.”

They stop talking when a couple of men pass him. George acknowledges them, raising his glass slightly and nodding his head. He takes a sip and almost scrunches up his face.

“How does it taste?” Theseus smirks.

“Not good.”

“I have an idea,” Theseus whispers in Polish, for extra measure. “Smith’s probably expecting packages from wherever he gets them from. We’ll call him – tell him of another package under his name, and then get into his property.”

George raises his eyebrows. “Good idea,” he adds, “Justin.”

“No problem, Wayne,”

They commence their plan the following morning. George calls John Andy Smith and changes his accent into a rougher, thicker tone. “There’s a package waiting for you, Mr. Smith. I’ve been informed that it needs to be collected immediately.”

“A package?” Smith’s voice is old and grouchy. Theseus could roll his eyes at the man’s lack of patience and immediate complaint. The man grumbles under his breath, “*I wasn’t told there was another package.*”

“Mr. Smith?” George continues, his eyes glued to the property, as they hide in a car behind a couple of trees. “The item was sent with high importance.”

“*I’ll be there in twenty minutes,*” Smith grumbles. He hangs up, and the assassins remain until his car is seen driving out of the driveway and onto the road.

They enter his home, after. They are assassins, Sixteen and Graduate Two and they will complete their mission swiftly and flawlessly.

The shed is located past long grass and a wired fence. George presses the lock and gets it undone in a moment, no longer.

Inside, is empty. Not exactly empty, as shovels and equipment litter the area. Theseus surveys the surroundings, picking up a small spade.

“Don’t touch anything,” George grits, and grabs the gun from his belt. He surveys the scene and walks carefully. They expect what they are looking for, money and a lot of it. Yet they are empty-handed as the shed does not have what they want.

“Theseus,” George states again when Theseus moves around belongings. “What did I say?”

“Gogy,” Theseus mutters. “There aren’t stairs, so there has to be something obscuring any way down.”

“What?”

“The floor is hollow,” they both tap their feet on the wood. “There should be something here, to help us get downwards.” George stares at Theseus then, with something clouding his vision.

Eventually, he says, “Good idea,” and they both search. George finds it, hidden behind a metal shelf. A lever he pulls for a flight of stairs allows them to travel downstairs. They are met with stacks of money, rows, and rows that cover the surface. They smirk.

Theseus tosses the spade between his hands as George assesses the worth. “Over a million,” he announces.

“A million?” Theseus drops the tool and joins him. “No fuckin’ way.”

“Now what do we have here?”

Their plan is not flawless, not anymore. Smith appears behind, a gun pointed at them. “I don’t know who the fuck you are, or who you work for – but I want your arms in the air before I shoot.”

George steps forward, his knives flickering forward as he quickly swipes toward Smith to dismantle his gun. He is not successful, however, he manages to square Smith in the stomach and shoulder, for him to stumble backward. He loses his footing, but he still shoots.

George is fast and shows no hesitation. Smith is no match for him.

But then the gun is aimed at Theseus and time goes still. “Take a step,” Smith dares. “And I’ll shoot him.”

“You think I care if he lives?” George persists, with an eyebrow raise.

“I think you do,” Smith growls. “Drop your weapons,” his fingers edge towards the trigger. “Blood isn’t a nice sight to see,”

George glances around. Smith shoots behind Tommy, an inch beside his ear. He does not bluff, and George drops his weapons.

“And you,” Smith glares at Theseus. “Don’t try anything.” Theseus drops his weapons, too. “Now,” Smith starts. “Who do you work for? I want fucking names.”

“You would not have heard of us,” George smirks.

“Considering I am the one with the gun, I suggest elaborating.”

“The Academy,” George says.

“I can’t say I’ve heard of you,”

“Well, you’re about to,” George says and Tommy charges towards Smith, his feet sliding as he pulls for Smith’s arm, to pull him backward. He shoves him to the side and kicks his upper arm for the gun to fly forward. George shouts at Theseus, to keep him away from the weapons littered on the ground, as George jumps on Smith to shove his head into the floor.

Smith fights back, clawing into Theseus’ skin and throwing him to the side. Theseus knees him and grabs the top of his head, to slam him into the floorboard. Smith growls, grabbing Theseus’ leg, refusing to let go, until he stamps on his side. Smith pulls his shirt, for Theseus to fall on the ground, and he is out of breath for a moment and wind. It is not enough to keep the assassin down,

as Theseus grabs the spade that he has discarded on the floor, to hit him on the head. He raises his arms and Smith flinches as the metal collides with his skull. Smith groans and uses his last strength to reach for his gun which is situated to his right.

George takes a step and presses his shoe against it. He raises his gun and shoots. Smith's eyes roll back.

The two boys collapse on the floor as the adrenaline leaves both of them.

"Well done," George nods his head, through their heavy pants. "Well done, Theseus,"

"You did it," Theseus responds. George had killed him. He had done the dirty work and will see his face in his dreams.

"You came up with the plan, you located the money. I'd be proud to call you our fourth."

They return with blood-stained cash and tired eyes. George wraps his arm around Theseus' shoulder before they are collected. He tells him again that he is proud. Theseus does not think he will ever forget.

Sapnap still dreams of fire and flame.

He wakes up angry and he falls asleep exhausted from what life has become. He lives with regret and grief. He blames himself for what he has done to George, and what he has done to his family.

(Dream will never be able to spend another moment with his partner. Tommy will never speak to his mentor – his brother - again.)

The fury keeps Sapnap alive, it fuels his persistence for revenge.

He is ready to take The Academy down. Blades rotate between his fingers, and he throws them as he leaps. He pins the targets down and he stands again, blood pumping and his heart racing. He will avenge George, and he will keep his family protected. So, he trains and fights and lets the light ignite inside of him.

The flames have never felt so close, they have never felt so *hot*.

Sapnap will avenge George and protect his family. Even if it is the last thing he does.

one heck of a chapter

i hit 150k+ words with this chapter, that's kinda crazy. still so much to do with this story and i promise there's going to be a long calm after the storm - decipher that as you will

felt quirky with the tags might add some later

#dogdaysao3 on twitter and tumbr so i can read your predictions and theories

i made a tumbr account i also have no idea how it works pls

<https://pathicsoul.tumblr.com/>

Number

Chapter Summary

“What do you think?” Dream asks George, who has a knowing glance in his eyes.

“What do you think happened?”

George turns away, the glimpse in his eyes settling and fading away.

“I don’t know.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It is not common for Purpled to receive phone calls from someone, who is not Punz.

The phone flashes with the name ‘Guy’ and Purpled sighs, picking up.

Guy is a person he meets through his brother. Punz pushes him to talk to other agents at *Las Nevadas*, as Purpled is present on the grounds for hours every week. They are not friends. Purpled does not make friends. (Although Punz does make him give his phone number away.)

Purpled waits for Guy to respond first.

“*I’m sorry,*” the man says after a beat of hesitation.

Purpled rolls his eyes and sits up from his bed. “What did you do this time?” He huffs, fatigue present in his morning voice.

“*Did you just wake up?*” Guy asks incredulously. “*It’s the afternoon, dude.*”

“You’re not my father,” Purpled snaps. He is fully aware of the time after checking the clock on his phone. He’s tired from training the previous day. (The freedom sometimes confuses him, even if it has been years since he’s escaped. Punz doesn’t mind when he sleeps or wakes up. As long as he gets to school on time and completes his daytime responsibilities, he’s a free man.)

“*Ok, yeah,*” Guy mutters.

“Spit it out.”

“*I met someone from The Academy. And I told them I knew you—*”

Purpled scrambles out of bed and he screams. “What the fuck?”

“*Hear me out!*”

“Fuck,” Purpled groans and presses his eyes shut. “Guy, do you know how fucking stupid, you are? How *fucking* stupid?” He regrets disclosing his past to anyone. His mind spins with thoughts, as he realizes: they’ve finally found him.

“*Purpled!*” Guy shouts, interrupting. “*They escaped too,*”

Purpled's heart stops.

"What?" His voice is slow and quiet. Guy gulps. He may be three years younger, but he knows Guy fears him.

(He *is* from The Academy, after all.)

"I don't know the details, but they're working with Quackity to take down The Academy. Did Punz not tell you?"

"No." Purpled swallows thickly. "No, he didn't."

Punz is busy guarding for Quackity. When they do speak, it's never about work. Although, Purpled would have expected Punz to tell him *this*.

"His name is Tommy; he didn't recognize your name. Do you know him?"

Purpled does not know of a Tommy.

"What number is he?"

"What?" Purpled hears his confusion.

"We're assigned a number," Purpled states calmly, even though he is anything but. "Did he tell you, his number? It's on his wrist."

"Ohh," Guy exclaims with a chuckle. *"He had asked for your number. I thought he was asking for your phone number,"*

Purpled blinks. "Why would he want that?"

"I don't know!"

"Do you know how old he is, then?"

"He's sixteen." So, he is a year younger. Although they do not go around telling each other their names, Purpled knows many. He knows why Tommy does not know his name – as he's changed his. Maybe, Tommy's changed his too.

"He has an older brother as well. He's our mentor, and he escaped too. His name is, uh, Dream."

Purpled reacts almost immediately. When he does, his heart pummels.

"Did you say *Dream*?"

"Yeah, why?"

Purpled may go into a state of panic. But he must compose himself and figure out a solution. Dream is here to get him – why would *he* have escaped? He is The Academy's highest performing assassin; he is who the students must become. Dream is unbeatable and valued. He is enough to survive The Academy. There is no reason for him to escape – no single reason.

Dream is here to find him. Dream is here to kill him.

The longer he thinks about it, the longer it does not make sense.

“Purpled?” Guy questions. *“I’m sorry for telling him, Tommy can be pretty uh, intimidating? You should join us again; they need as many agents as possible to take the agency down.”*

Purpled freezes. They’re taking it down?

“I have to go, dude. I’m sorry again, I’ll speak later,” The phone call cuts, and Purpled drops it on the floor.

Dream escapes. Guy says that they are working with Quackity.

Purpled thinks for longer, and it makes more sense. Although his heart still races at the thought of seeing Dream, he knows that he is not here for him. He is here for The Academy. And Punz must know of him – so he’s safe for now.

Purpled wonders to himself, that if Dream is here, then maybe Sapnap is too. *Sapnap*.

Purpled grabs his phone and rushes to find Punz.

“Gray,” Sapnap chuckles. Sometimes, his eyes look like orange fire. “You need to increase your defense, you can’t just attack,”

“Why not?” He swings and Sapnap stumbles.

“Because then, this will happen.” A moment later, Sapnap finds his unguarded side and flips him. He crashes down onto the mats with a loud *thud*. He groans when Sapnap laughs.

“Told you.”

“I hate it when you say that,”

“So maybe listen to me more,” Sapnap rolls his eyes and helps him up. He is about to continue speaking when they both feel eyes on them. Twisting to the door of the training hall, they see Dream staring blankly.

“Dream!” Sapnap waves and calls over. Gray tenses. It’s not that he doesn’t like Dream, but he is tough and strict, and will likely tell the Teachers if he is out of line. Although Dream is Sapnap’s associate – they complete missions together as they are Graduates. Two of the highest.

“Sapnap,” Dream nods his head and peers at him. “Twenty-nine.”

“Gray,” Sapnap corrects his name, and Gray gulps. If Dream knows there is a connection – a friendship, then Gray will face the consequences. “You can call him that,”

“A word, Sapnap?” Dream frowns and Sapnap nods his head, patting Gray’s shoulder as he leaves the room.

He hears them when he stretches. “What the fuck are you doing, Sapnap?”

“Nothing, man.”

“Don’t do anything you’ll regret, I’ve told you.”

“I know, I know. But this kid’s got potential, Dream. I see it,”

“I told you to not do something you regret.”

Gray turns away when Sapnap returns. “Sorry ‘bout that. Do you want to go over what we did in class, again?”

“I heard you,” Gray stands up and faces the Graduate. “I have potential?”

Sapnap’s forehead creases. “Don’t listen to our conversations,” but his voice is not threatening. “You do. I think you can be our fourth, Gray. I see it in you.”

“You do?”

Sapnap grins and covers his expression in a second, into boldness. “Okay, back to training.”

“Where’s Quackity?” Dream barges into the training hall, Tommy on his tail. They go to Big Q’s office, which is left empty. Punz is not present, so they find Karl and Sapnap instead.

Tommy swiftly shields his eyes when they find two figures by the mats. “*Fuck!*” He slaps his eyes closed. He did not want to see an image of Karl and his brother making out – certainly not on his agenda.

“Sapnap,” Dream groans and Tommy peeks through his fingers to see red, flustered faces. “Where’s Quackity?”

“How would I know?” Sapnap groans and whispers in Karl’s ear. Dream and Tommy can both hear him, because their hearing is irregular, as he apologizes.

“You should be apologizing to *me*,” Tommy groans, hearing his words.

“Shut up, Tommy.”

“Shut up, Sapnap.”

Dream rubs his temple. “Karl, do you know where Quackity may be? He isn’t in his office.”

Karl raises his eyebrows. “Why do you need him?”

Dream and Tommy swap expressions. “Do you know a person called Purpled?”

Karl furrows his eyebrows, and Sapnap interrupts. “Who’s that?”

“A person from The Academy,” Dream frowns. “He’s an assassin here, which Quackity forgot to inform us about – for whatever reason that is.”

“What?” Sapnap moves closer to them with Karl behind. “We’re talking about the same Academy, aren’t we?”

“What other one would we talking about?” Tommy rolls his eyes. Sapnap scoffs and pulls a face at him.

“One of the students in my class knew him. Apparently, he escaped as well,”

“I don’t remember anyone called Purpled,” Sapnap mutters. “Not one who escaped, anyway.”

“Maybe he escaped before you guys did?” Karl offers. “A while ago?”

Sapnap and Dream look over at each other, and Sapnap shakes his head. “We would still know. I have a feeling he’s younger if he’s friends with someone from one of Dream’s classes. The agents he teaches are younger.”

“That’s right,” Dream confirms. “There’s a reason why Quackity kept it from us, then.”

“Wait,” Sapnap gulps. “Purpled?”

“Yeah?”

“That name is recognizable,” Sapnap hesitates. “I remember it.”

They all have good memories. (Tommy maybe less, due to the testing and disappearing faces from his past – but they’ve returned so we wouldn’t say his recollection is completely worse.) But Sapnap’s has always been the best.

“Where from?” Dream folds his arms.

“I’m not sure,”

They walk back to Quackity’s office as Sapnap attempts to remember. “I remember someone saying the name,” he says. “I don’t know when or who though,” They arrive at Quackity’s office who still isn’t present. They stay here because Quackity will return soon enough and if Sapnap sits down, then he may remember faster.

Tommy bolts for Quackity’s spinning chair when they enter. Yet he is stopped by Dream he clutches the back of his shirt. “Tommy,” Tommy can almost hear his eyes roll.

“Dream,” Tommy mocks.

“Sit on the couch,” Tommy sighs and sits by Karl and Sapnap. Sapnap leans back and stares at the roof while Karl holds his hands. Tommy knows they’re dating, but it’s almost strange to see Sapnap so close with someone else who isn’t Dream, George, and well, himself. Sapnap leans into the touch and holds, and Tommy recalls the countless lessons Sapnap was strict of a lack of connection and care to survive.

He did end up caring. They did end up becoming brothers.

But it had taken a while. So, Tommy’s glad because he knows Dream and him are changing, as

well as Sapnap.

“We were in here,” Sapnap suddenly blurts. “Dream, you had left the room after you were getting angry.”

Dream squints his eyes, slowly remembering.

“You had punched Quackity, something to do with Phil,”

“Sapnap,” Dream growls. “Get along with it,”

“This is helping me!” Sapnap squawks as Dream reaches over to punch him, and Tommy laughs. Dream turns to him and smiles lightly.

“After, we had asked Punz if he had any advice,” Sapnap then says, and his words become softer and slower.

“I think I remember this,” Tommy confirms, but Karl is left clueless. “What did he say?”

“I don’t remember exactly but I’m pretty sure he mentioned his brother’s name being Purpled.”

“Punz?” Karl questions. “Are you sure?”

Sapnap hesitates. “Yeah, I think I am.” Tommy doesn’t doubt him. Sapnap’s memory has helped them out in a few situations. He recalls the conversation anyway, although not the name of Punz’s brother.

They sit, stunned.

“Quackity should have told you,” Karl then states. “He has no reason not to,”

“Unless Punz hadn’t told him?” Tommy offers and they sigh. Tommy wishes he remembers a Purpled, but he does not. He racks his memory for a boy with the following name and a face alike Punz’s, but his mind goes blank.

“That still doesn’t answer a lot of things,” Dream stands. “If they are siblings and if Purpled escaped, then Punz would have been at The Academy too,”

“He’s twenty-three, a year older than you,” Sapnap responds, frowning. “Do you remember anyone from the above year...?”

Dream shakes his head, and Karl interrupts. “Punz didn’t go to The Academy. Quackity’s known him for years.”

The three assassins in the room furrow their eyebrows. They are all confused and bear the same thought.

“Purpled would have lost his memories, Karl,” Sapnap explains carefully. “If Purpled escaped, he shouldn’t remember Punz. Unless they aren’t brothers—”

Karl sits back. “Punz had once been an assassin for Quackity, years ago. He was young as well and could have been going to school even. But Quackity was only starting his business and needed all the help he could get. After a couple of years, Punz did leave though, for a while. He came back and became Quackity’s guard. Never mentioned what happened when he left, though. To me, at least.”

“What?” Tommy stumbles. “How does that make sense?”

“I don’t know,” Sapnap and Dream say together. They glance at one another and then look away.

“I texted Quackity,” Karl then interrupts their thinking. “He’ll be back soon, he has a few business meetings – I assume Punz is with him.”

Sapnap stands. “Are we waiting?”

“No,” Dream sighs. “I’m guessing it’s going to take a few more hours. Tommy and I will go back to the apartment, are you coming?”

“I think I’ll train for a little longer,” Tommy notices how Sapnap glances at Karl, whose cheeks tint pink.

“Okay then,” Dream nods his head. “Let’s go, Tommy,”

Tommy frowns. “I think I’ll train longer too.”

“You should sleep, you’re tired,” Tommy doesn’t know how he notices. “Until Quackity comes back, anyway.” Dream ends up pulling Tommy’s arms, tugging him off the couch. They bid ways from Sapnap and Karl and go back to their floor.

“Maybe they’re not blood brothers?” Tommy offers in the elevator, attempting to come to any form of conclusion. “And Punz met him after he left working for Quackity?”

“I guess,” Dream shoves his fists in the pockets of his hoodie. They stare at their reflection on the metal door, as they move up floors. Dream is still taller, Tommy notices. Though it won’t be long until he catches up.

“I have a feeling they are, though,” Dream says. “I think Punz knows more about The Academy than he’s letting on.”

“You know something too,” Tommy raises an eyebrow.

“I do,”

The elevators open, and Dream rushes out, Tommy following fast behind him. “Well?”

“Get inside first,” Dream answers and they do. They go to the living room, and Tommy collapses on the couch while Dream sits by him. The TV remains off, and the only sound is their steady breaths and the clock in the corner of the room.

“I was told to keep an eye on each of the students,” Dream starts by saying, but Tommy already knows this. He, George, and Sapnap had. That’s how they had found out about him; because Dream had watched his class one evening and noticed him. “Keep tabs on each, and report anything I noticed. Sometimes, it would help the student out. If the Teachers believed they were dragging the class down with weakness, they weren’t valued. It helped them be seen.”

Dream glances at him, then, and then back to the blank TV, where their dull reflections are almost visible from the distance. “Other times, it didn’t help so much.” The Teachers went harder and would hold them to a higher standard – so they could prove themselves worthy.” Tommy knows this. It is why Dream had not told anyone about him for a while. Dream wanted to keep him safe – protected.

Dream continues, “I noticed students who excelled regularly. A few younger and older than you. There were many, at some point, I was given files of basic knowledge of each student. Their weaknesses and abilities, so I could keep track.”

“I thought we weren’t allowed to see them,” Tommy says. “They kept them hidden for a reason.”

“We weren’t. I guess I was an exception.” (Dream is an exception. He is Graduate One, after all.)

“Over time though, I noticed that the files were met with empty faces – those students who I had been tracking their progress was disappearing. Fast, too. It wasn’t a few, sometimes it was sweeps of students who I didn’t see again. When I asked, they told me the natural consequences of failed missions and exercises. Nothing I would have had to doubt – but I did. It had gotten regular, too constant to become coincidental.”

“So, what you’re saying…”

“I assumed,” Dream nods, finishing Tommy’s sentence for him. “The Academy wanted to get rid of students. An overpopulation or for any other reason – so they killed them intentionally. Took them away from themselves and hid them.”

“You don’t think it was from any of the exercises?” Tommy knows how deadly they can be. He recalls one of the worse ones, where they are trapped in a room with other siblings. No food or water. When days pass, they are led to believe that they have been forgotten.

Tommy shivers.

“I don’t think so,” Dream shakes his head. “It was too apparent, one day many students were there, the next they weren’t. I noticed over time, how the number had grown large. They increased the number of students who were taken away every time and hoping no one could figure it out.”

“And if someone did figure it out? It’s not as if anyone could do anything.”

“Maybe,” Dream exhales. “It was less of hoping no one figured out what they were doing. But rather driving fear into everyone. If they weren’t good enough, they would not be here the next day. So, to figure out what happened to the others, everyone would keep it to themselves. As a personal purpose to be better.”

Tommy gulps as a memory appears in his mind. His skin turns to ice, as do his insides. “I remember,”

“Hm?”

“Rows, we’d stand in rows,” Tommy’s eyes meet the floor. “I had almost forgotten.”

“What are you talking about, Tommy?”

“They’d gather all of us every once in a while,” he explains. “We’d stand in rows and the Headmaster, and some Teachers would walk by each of us, and some of us would be taken away.”

“I don’t remember this,” Dream replies.

“I don’t think you were there. Or Sapnap and George, or any of the Graduates.” The memory is unlocked, and Tommy remembers more. Of how they stop at him and stare into his soul. The Headmaster's deathly stare, and hushed whispers before they proceed on. And how a boy, a couple of rows down, having to be pulled away with screams echoing through their ears and engraving

their minds, along with the other screams and cries they once remember.

“We weren’t told much but there were speculations,” Tommy’s mouth has a mind of its own, as it recalls the memory. “I think we forgot about them after that. Another student, another memory. We all continued.”

“I’m surprised,” Dream tells him. “That you couldn’t remember. Your memory is usually well.”

“I guess I’ve forgotten a lot of things,” Tommy mutters. “After the experiments, I forgot the faces. I guess I forgot other things too.”

“Maybe we should get that checked up,” Dream offers, and Tommy hasn’t stood up and stepped away so fast before.

“Fuck no,”

“Tommy,” Dream sighs. “Sit down,”

“I’m not going to go anywhere – I’m never seeing one of them again.” He doesn’t want to see lab-coated people. He refuses.

“Okay, okay,” Dream raises his hands in the air. “You don’t have to. But you know Quackity’s medics aren’t bad. They won’t hurt you.”

“You don’t fucking know that,”

“I do,” Dream confirms. “Sit down.”

“I’m good standing.”

Tommy ends up sitting.

“That doesn’t explain why they never told us,” Dream sighs. “Why they never told us what they were doing.”

“Maybe you’d stop them?”

“Maybe.”

Tommy closes his eyes and rests. But he’s startled awake. “Dream,” he groans. “You told me I could sleep,”

“I know, I know, but now that I’ve been thinking about it, I do need to speak to you about something.”

Tommy blinks and rubs his eyes. “Can it be quick, then?”

“I don’t think so,” Tommy sees his face, which is solemn and serious.

This cannot be good, Tommy thinks and eyes the exit of the room.

“We haven’t spoken about this in a while,” Dream’s eyes are piercing green, and analyzes every movement of his face, noticing every small reaction to his words. “But I wanted to know what happened to the nightmares.”

“You know what happened,” Tommy blurts out. “You know.”

"I know you couldn't sleep," Dream corrects him. "Because we weren't there,"

"Fuck you!" Tommy shouts. "I could sleep fine," He lies.

"Okay, okay, sure," Dream sighs. "What I meant to say is that there was a time you remembered the faces. But you didn't want to talk about it, and I stopped asking because I wanted to give you space. I admit I stopped asking because I thought you stopped seeing them."

"Yeah, I guess."

"So, you don't see them anymore?" Glimpses and images of the past. Red eyes and white faces of the previous souls he's killed. Tommy can vividly remember them, he will never not.

"I do," Tommy says gently. "But I don't want to talk about it."

"I know that," Dream furrows his eyebrows. "But if you don't talk to me, then you won't talk to anyone. And I'm not okay with that."

Tommy groans. "Fuck off,"

"I'm talking to you about this," Dream repeats, firmer. "Because if I don't, no one else will"

It is almost a reminder, painful or not. That Tommy only has Dream, and no one else. He may have had Wilbur, Techno, and Philza in another life, but he can't speak to them. He isn't sure he can face them again. (He's almost certain of that fact.)

"They're there," Tommy spits. "Are you happy? I see them sometimes, and I don't. When I start sleeping properly again, I'll see them again. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"I want you to talk to me," Dream confirms. "So yes, I am happy. Because I know with certainty that Sapnap is the last person you'll tell, so there's only me."

"That's fucking sad," Tommy presses his lips together. "Is what it is."

"No," Dream denies. "I think one more person is better than no one."

At The Academy, he had no one. Now he has Dream.

Although Tommy does argue. "I did have you, George, and Sapnap. I think I used to think I didn't, but I did."

Tommy used to think he was alone as Theseus. He was never lonely, but always alone. He used to think that Dream's loyalty would end at some point, that betrayal would soon come. The dreadful feeling stayed with him for years and doubted his brothers.

Then they left, and Theseus, who became Tommy, him, learned to realize he wasn't so alone. Ever.

Dream smiles. "It took you months to realize that,"

"You suck," Tommy grumbles as Dream ruffles his hair.

"I hope you got it into your thick skull, then."

"I don't have a thick skull. It's a perfectly normally shaped one." Tommy persists and Dream rolls his eyes, shoving his shoulder.

“You aren’t alone. You do have us; you’ve always had us. So, talk to me kid, talk to Sapnap if you want, either. But I want you to tell someone when you’re feeling... like that, or when you get nightmares, or when you remember something, you don’t want to remember. You weren’t alone then, and you’re not alone now. You can tell us.”

There are numbers.

Lists of numbers. With each number, there is a face.

Dream notices them all. Until they disappear.

It is unexplained, they are present one morning and they disappear, the next.

He keeps an eye on Theseus after that. Just in case.

When Theseus has not been seen for six days, is when Dream begins to worry.

He begins to worry earlier – day four. Day six is when he makes his worries public.

“Where’s Theseus?” He asks Sapnap and George over breakfast. There are times when Theseus is not seen for days and returns with burns and bruises. It is usually days back from the white room or another exercise where they are locked in a dark room without food and water with the rest of their classmates. (Dream always must pretend to not notice Theseus’ closeness to him following the days of those types of lessons.)

George raises his eyebrows and Sapnap grins. “Pay up, Gogs,”

“What?” Dream deadpans.

George rolls his eyes and tosses Sapnap his vanilla pudding.

“What?” Dream repeats.

“We made a bet,” Sapnap grins. “George said you’d last a little longer than a week until you asked. I said at most six.”

“I was scammed,” George mutters.

“No, you weren’t,”

Dream grits his teeth and furrows his eyebrows. “Well? Do you know anything?”

“Why would we know anything? If anything, you were told,” Sapnap takes a bite of his desert. He isn’t false, as Dream is usually the one informed by Teachers or the Headmaster – not Sapnap or George who must find out through him of events or any particular lessons. Sapnap used to be envious of Dream’s higher status but he and the rest of the Graduates learn to accept it.

“We haven’t seen him in six days,” Dream stares at his food. He won’t say he’s nervous. Not yet. “He’s usually back sooner,”

“You’re nervous,” George says anyway. “Theseus will get through it. We all did.”

Dream glances up, and his hands grip the table, tight. He loosens his hold after he takes a deep breath out. “That doesn’t mean he *should*,”

“He can handle it,” Sapnap says. “He’s Theseus after all,”

Dream knows Theseus can handle it – he knows of Theseus’ capability and potential. He is a brilliant assassin; he is fast and smart. Dream knows that the boy will overtake him one day – the day will come when Theseus will be better than he is.

But that does not mean it has to happen. Theseus shouldn’t be better with knives; he shouldn’t be a better assassin or have the potential to kill. It is not that Dream is envious – far from it. Rather he refuses to allow Theseus to become him, to live the life that Dream lives currently.

“Give it two more days,” Sapnap shrugs off carelessly.

“Two?” Dream isn’t sure if he can. He’ll ask a Teacher beforehand. Although he knows that may be risky, considering an Instructor had almost found the two messing around in the training rooms a couple of weeks before. They had been close, and Dream had to make sure that they did not display connection or care – as the Teachers would grow suspicion and inform the Headmaster.

“Two,” Sapnap confirms. “Two more days.”

Two days pass. Theseus does not return.

Dream does not fall asleep. He walks past Theseus’ room every so often, where his bed is placed in the fourth row, the fourth to the right. It is empty every time he passes.

Theseus returns on day nine. He is quiet and does not speak. He is unlike himself and does not return a jab when Sapnap throws one his way, as he usually would.

“Where did you go?” Dream questions Theseus, holding his shoulders carefully and studying the boy’s dull features. Life has left and what lingers is emptiness.

“The white room.”

Theseus leaves (and Dream wishes he could get the kid out of here).

Theseus eventually starts speaking again. He starts eating too when Sapnap threatens to never share his vanilla puddings with him again.

“You can have George’s too,” Sapnap promises, and Theseus agrees to eat his meals again. Dream chuckles but appreciates the compromise. Sapnap may value the deserts after betting for a weeks-worth with George, but he will not hesitate when handing them to the younger.

George and Sapnap don't end up getting anything out of Theseus, either, for the missed nine days. He utters the words 'the white room' and leaves it at that. Sapnap does mention noticing extra bruises and scars lined up his skin.

("What do you think?" Dream asks George, who has a knowing glance in his eyes. "What do you think happened?"

George turns away, the glimpse in his eyes settling and fading away.

"I don't know.")

Purpled looks for Punz.

He's still dozy from sleep and startled from the previous phone call, but he was once an assassin and focuses. It is easy too, with the busy noises around him that his ears connect to every passing step. He hears the conversation by him, phones ringing, and the sound of cars stopping at red lights.

He learns to block the sounds out once his senses develop and form him into a better assassin. Yet now, the sounds keep him alert as he pushes through the busy street of people as he heads to *Las Nevadas*.

He and Punz live in a small house close to Nevadas. Punz had said something about work and life separation. That, and he wanted Purpled to have easy access to the school he would be going to. But they had an apartment on the grounds by Quackity's office, one that Punz would rarely stay at as he worked constantly.

Purpled doesn't mind. He is used to solitude, and being alone.

He learns over the years that he is not alone. Not anymore. He has Punz, and he'd drop his work for him in an instant. But Quackity pays well, especially for the hours he does, so the two brothers form their days around busy scheduling and irregular sleeping patterns.

Purpled tells Punz everything. He tells him of the easy homework, and his desire to go to college and do what his previous classmates cannot. He tells Punz of the people in his class who are loud and how everything feels so different. Punz returns, by telling him about his day. Of Quackity's blunt attitude and remarks. Purpled thinks that Punz tells him everything. He is wrong because Punz doesn't.

Dream is here, Quackity plans to take down The Academy and Punz tells him nothing.

The bus arrives at the grounds of *Nevadas* soon, and Purpled jumps off quickly. He is here regularly, usually with Punz or training, though. He doesn't think he'll be an assassin again, Purpled isn't sure if he can handle it. There will always be that thought of his past coming up to creep on him.

Purpled does not find difficulty finding the main building. It is quite large and surrounded by guards and agents. The only problem is finding his brother in the first place.

Luckily, he finds someone recognizable. Antfrost. “Ant!”

Ant turns. His eyes widen. “Purpled? I haven’t seen you in a while,”

“I’ve been busy,” Purpled sighs. “Have you seen Punz?”

“Oh,” Antfrost places his hands on his hips. “I’m not sure, have you not seen him?”

Purpled shrugs and blows his hair out of his eyes. “No, I need to talk to him.”

“Try his apartment. If he’s not there, he’s with Quackity.” If he’s with Quackity, then he can be anywhere. “Try the training rooms, as well.”

“Okay,” Purpled turns away and lifts his hand as a ‘goodbye.’ “Thanks.” He does not hear Antfrost’s response, and he walks into the building, flashing the card his brother had given him, to the front office, going into the elevators. It is busy, but he manages to travel alone.

The training hall is empty. So is the apartment. Purpled finds a chocolate bar though, which keeps his spirits high as he calls Punz again.

This time, Punz picks up.

“Thank fuck,” Purpled sighs, as Punz speaks.

“*Hey, are you okay?*” Purpled does not call regularly. Punz usually has to call him.

“Why didn’t you tell me about Dream?” Purpled shouts, bluntly. “Why the *fuck* was I not told?”

Punz’s sigh is long and loud. “*I’ll talk to you about this when I get back—*”

“No, fuck you,” Purpled spits. “You’re meant to tell me everything.”

“*Well then,*” Punz responds, harshly. “*You didn’t tell me when you punched that kid in your class. Which I was informed by Admin. Or that you started smoking again. Purpled?*”

“I’m allowed to smoke.”

“*We’ll talk about this when I get back. I’ll explain,*” Punz mutters. “*Where are you?*”

“Why can’t you tell me now?” Purpled grabs the table. “Punz, you can’t keep that from me.”

“*I know, I know. I was going to tell you.*”

Purpled is ready to swear at him and lash out. But the fire sizzles as he remembers to remain calm and the inner assassin inside of him reminds him that anger is not the solution, and that anger makes him weak. He ends up with an empty and cold, “Fuck you,” and ends the call afterward.

Purpled shoves the rest of the chocolate bar in the trash bin and finds the training rooms to let off some steam. He will drive the emotion out of him before he lashes out. He shouldn’t feel so angry, but he does. He ends up punching a boy in his class when he makes fun of his scars.

Purpled should be calm. Collected. He is not like this; he is not himself.

The training hall is almost empty when he enters. Two agents are speaking, others sparring on mats and more on the treadmill. He finds the punching bags in the corner of the room and does not waste time until he feels empty again. *Gray* is empty, *Purpled* is not. But *Purpled* doesn't want to feel, and he has never felt so confused.

When he finishes, he finds the weapons and aims for the targets. His arms bend and the blade flies. He does not miss, he never does.

There is then a presence by him. "You have good technique."

Purpled ignores the voice.

He throws another blade. And another. When he goes to collect them, the voice is slightly louder. "You're good,"

Purpled takes a deep breath in but does not turn around. His eyebrows edge upwards. "Okay," he says as he pulls the knives out. The voice comes closer, behind his shoulder. *Purpled* feels his breaths close.

The man chuckles. "I don't think I've seen better technique, here."

"Thanks?" *Purpled* feels the handle against his palm, as he pulls the next one around.

"Do you want to spar then?"

The last knife is wedged in. *Purpled* pulls. "I don't want to go easy on you,"

"Then don't."

Purpled turns.

Purple meets green.

Green eyes. *Purpled* sees a flame. *Purpled* sees a past.

("I'm *Sapnap*," The Graduate smiles, even though it is known to all. "And you?"

"Gray.")

"What?" his lips part, in shock. "Your—"

Purpled stares. He knows him. He knows it's *Sapnap*.

"*Sapnap*," he echoes his mind, and the man finally registers him.

"No," *Sapnap* denies. "No."

(One day Gray disappears.

Sapnap promises never to forget.)

“Sapnap,” Purpled repeats, and the knife falls.

“*Gray,*”

Chapter End Notes

hey :)

um i watched heartstopper so i blame the late update on that

thanks for reading and leaving comments <3

Powerless

Chapter Summary

Purpled does not let go. Sapnap does not let him.

Then Sapnap whispers, “I thought you died,” and Purpled crumbles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Gray,”

Strong arms wrap around his shoulders and push him forward. He collides with a heavy chest, and a chin rests on his hair. Sapnap’s hold is tight yet comforting.

It feels familiar, Purpled recollects. As a past, he wishes to never remember.

He does remember, however, as he is plagued through memories and glimpses. Sapnap will be someone who he never forgets and wishes to never forget either.

(The sun is hot and life passes.

Gray promises to never forget.)

“Gray,” Sapnap murmurs in his hair. “You’ve grown.”

Purpled almost responds, but his throat closes and he forgets what to say. Because this is Sapnap, and years ago, he thought he never would see him again.

Purpled does not let go. Sapnap does not let him.

Then Sapnap whispers, “I thought you died,” and Purpled crumbles.

Purpled does not cry. Crying makes him weak, and Purpled must be strong. But Sapnap’s soft whispers cause him to shake and feel pain. It hurts, not like the dark bruises on his skin and the stinging pain of burns. This hurts his heart, and Purpled cannot stop himself from falling.

Sapnap keeps ahold of him. “I’m here, I’m here,” he reassures. He rests his hands on the back of his head and forces his face upwards. “Let me take a good look at you, kid,”

“No,” Purpled manages to say, his face stained with tears, probably red as well. “No,”

Sapnap’s smile is strained. There is a fire in his eyes Purpled remembers seeing so long ago. “You haven’t changed. You still have a babyface.”

“I don’t,” Purpled wipes his tears with his sleeve.

“Your frown makes you look older. Smile.”

Purpled doesn’t and pushes his arms around Sapnap again, his heart pounding. Sapnap falters, hit

with the weight against him, but he chuckles and reciprocates the hug again. “I can’t believe it’s you.”

At some point, they sit and Sapnap doesn’t stop staring.

“What?” Purpled snaps, eventually. He rubs his hot cheeks and controls his breaths.

“You look healthy,”

Purpled furrows his eyebrows. “Fuck you.”

Sapnap laughs. Loud, and carefree. Purpled blinks, startled. Sapnap does not laugh like that at The Academy. He cannot if he doesn’t want to be caught. But it’s been years since then, Purpled wants to know how long he’s escaped.

“I’m not surprised,” Sapnap grins. “You haven’t changed.”

“Why would I?”

Sapnap shrugs his shoulders and pulls his arm forward to ruffle his hair. “I was told you were here. I didn’t believe it.”

“What?”

Sapnap raises an eyebrow. “You don’t know?”

“I found out today you and Dream were here,” Purpled deadpans. “Today morning.”

“You’re here,” Sapnap remarks. “And so am I.”

Purpled wonders how fate works. He and Sapnap meet each other at The Academy. Years later, they meet again. This time, at *Las Nevadas*. (Where one plans to take down the former place, and the other is ready to join him.)

“Can you explain to me what’s going on?” Purpled questions. “Punz won’t tell me anything.”

“Punz is really your brother?”

“Yeah?”

Sapnap nods his head slowly, and Purpled rolls his eyes.

“Just because we’re brothers, doesn’t mean we have the same color eyes, dumbass.”

“I knew that!” Sapnap laughs but Purpled can see through the lie.

Sapnap goes on to explain why they are here and what they will do. And Purpled listens because that’s all he can do for now. Sapnap explains how he escaped The Academy a few months ago. And of his plans to take the place down after what they have done to him, and everyone he knows. He tells him of Quackity’s collaboration and Philza’s cooperation, another agency that Purpled can recall from somewhere in his memory – likely by Punz who had mentioned him once or more.

Sapnap also mentions Dream and Tommy.

“Tommy?” Purpled asks.

“He went by Theseus,” And Purpled then remembers a boy in the year younger than him, who excelled above many. Brown hair and blue eyes, Purpled remembers through the haze of his mind. “He goes by Tommy now. He’s my younger brother,”

Purpled nods his head.

“I was told you were Purpled,” Sapnap says and Purpled looks away fast. “So, what do you want me to call you?”

Gray or Purpled? He asks for an answer. Gray is his past, and Sapnap will always know that version of him. Sapnap made his past self worthy, and memorable.

“I don’t know,” Purpled answers honestly.

“Purpled,” Sapnap tests the name aloud. “I’ll call you Purpled, and you can tell me later otherwise.”

Purpled appreciates that. “Thanks,”

“Anything for you, kid.”

Purpled may cry again. He makes sure he doesn’t.

“Can you tell me what happened to you, now?” Sapnap’s voice is oddly light. “If you want to tell me.”

“We were taken,” Purpled responds instantly, his voice hardening. “Hidden; pretended to never exist. It was a desert; I can remember it clearly and most of us lasted a couple of days. I didn’t think I was going to make it either, but Punz had found me.”

“He found you?” Sapnap questions, squinting his eyes.

“Yeah, he’d be searching for me, for years beforehand. It took me a while to get used to him since I couldn’t remember. We stayed in Florida and then we came here,” Purpled says. “I go to school now.”

Sapnap smiles. “Do you like it?”

“No,” Purpled blurts out. “Everyone’s immature and annoying.”

Sapnap laughs again.

“A lot more happened, Sapnap,” Purpled then admits. “I, um... I—”

“You don’t have to tell me now,” Sapnap reassures. “You have all the time in the world to tell me. Do you want to do that?”

Purpled swallows. “Okay, yeah. Thanks.”

“Let’s get out of here, then. I want you to meet Tommy. And Dream.”

“Dre-am?” Purpled stutters, but Sapnap quickly reassures him.

“Don’t worry. Dream’s good.”

Purpled furrows his eyebrows. “Do you have memory loss?” His memories remind him of Dream –

anything but good. He is harsh and bold. Dream does not particularly like him.

“Dream’s changed,” Sapnap then promises. “We all have.”

They head out of the training room, and Sapnap swings an arm around his shoulder as they lead to his apartment. Sapnap tells him he’ll cook him something, and Purpled insults him because he knows Sapnap’s cooking skills are likely anything but decent. It is common banter, and it is like nothing has ever changed.

When they step into the elevator, Purpled side-eyes him to see Sapnap watching. He rolls his eyes with a loud sigh.

“Stop staring at me,”

“Sorry,” Sapnap apologizes, and his eyes are familiar and warm. “I just can’t believe it’s really you.”

Tommy stumbles out of his bedroom, rubbing his eyebrows, almost colliding with the wall in front of him.

He swears and opens his eyes to an assassin.

Tommy can detect an assassin fairly quickly. (He once was one after all.)

He does not hesitate to flicker out his knife, holding it in the air as his body switches to a defensive stance. His mind flashes and the fatigue leaves his body in an instant. “The fuck?!”

The assassin stares at him, passively. “Sapnap!” he shouts and Tommy wonders if he should aim and ruin the couch. “I’m being threatened at knifepoint!”

“Tommy!” Sapnap shouts and barrels into the room after his yells. He swears at the weapon in Tommy’s hand and snatches it off him.

“What the fuck, man?” Tommy grumbles, reaching for his knife, for Sapnap to pull it away.

“This is Purpled,” Sapnap points. “Purpled, Tommy.”

“What the fuck?” Tommy repeats as Purpled nods his head in acknowledgment, responding with a quiet, “what’s up?”

“He’s from The Academy, you know the details,” Sapnap sighs. “I’ll explain everything later.” And he leaves the room.

“Later?” Tommy yells after him. When Sapnap does not respond, his eyes snap to Purpled. “Who are you?”

“I think you know.”

Tommy bites the inside of his cheek. “How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“I’m older than you.”

“I don’t think you are,”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Bitch.”

“Child.”

Tommy opens his mouth to respond with an insult, or perhaps a swear, but he decides against it. Purpled is sprawled across the couch, and his purple eyes analyze every inch of him, as a previous assassin would.

“You didn’t throw the knife,” Purpled then commentates. “An assassin wouldn’t hesitate.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. He takes out another knife from his pocket. He has many on him, at all times. “Guess I’m not an assassin anymore,” he adds then, “And Sapnap loves that damn couch too much to let me stain it. Or for someone to break in and sit there.”

“Really?” Purpled raises his eyebrows.

“Yeah. Fuckin’ weirdo.”

“Weirdo,” Purpled agrees and Tommy thinks he might like him. “So, you’re his brother then?”

“I guess?”

“Sit down, Thomas, I think we have a few things to talk about.” Maybe not then.

Tommy scowls. “My name isn’t Thomas.”

“Isn’t Tommy a nickname?”

“I don’t fucking know, ask Dream.”

Purpled stays silent, and Tommy understands. Because not everyone receives treatment from Dream. Not everyone has someone to rely on him as he did. “Dream’s a good person.”

“Sapnap told me that too,” Purpled seems as if he disagrees though. Tommy can’t blame him. But people change, and he’s learning that too. “It’s as if you bow down to him and forget what he did to us.”

Tommy shrugs and moves over to sit down on the couch. Although Purpled shuffles away and they rest on other sides of the furniture. “Sapnap was like him too. We’ve all murdered people – it isn’t as if we’ll do the same with the improper intentions as before. You don’t have to trust Dream but know that he’s different.” Different from before. He’s changed.

“I’ll have to see it to believe it,” Purpled crosses his arms over his chest.

“Okay,” Silence resumed, as they both stare at each other, and stare each other up. Pinpointing one another’s weaknesses from physical appearance.

“When did you leave?” Tommy then asks.

“A couple years ago,” Tommy nods his head, unsurely. “My name was Gray then. But I’m Purpled.”

(Somewhere in his memory, Tommy recalls a Gray who shared a similar fighting style to Sapnap.)

“They used to say you were the best in your year,” Purpled then grins. “Are you?”

Probably not anymore. “I haven’t trained in a while.” Of course, he does train regularly with Sapnap and Dream. But their definition of the word ‘training’ is different from what agents at The Academy refer to it as. Because with training, there was a never-ending cycle of pushing their body to a state of collapsing. Sometimes they could not sleep if they did not deserve it. Sometimes the training would go and go on, and they’d wonder if it would ever stop.

Now, Sapnap is careful, and Dream is patient. It isn’t how it used to be.

“We’ll fight then,” Purpled grins. “If you’re up for it.”

Tommy just smiles. That’s all the confirmation that Purpled needs.

They stand on the other side of the room, facing each other. Purpled is slightly shorter, but he’s larger than Tommy’s skinny frame. His arms bulk and it’s obvious that he does stricter training than Tommy does. But Tommy’s learned and trained for the best, he won’t be cocky, but he will be smart.

When they both nod their heads, they begin.

Purpled is the first one to throw a punch. After circling the living room, he jumps forward to catch Tommy off guard. It works momentarily, as Tommy stumbles when he grabs a hold of him, but the blond-haired boy ducks, and shoves him out of the way, sliding an undercut to his side.

Purpled fires back, punching and hitting his sides. Tommy attempts to find a clear weakness as he dodges and ducks under the heavy fists, one of which he misses and goes colliding into his jaw. He clutches onto the stinging pain but ensures Purpled is caught off guard by delivering a kick to his stomach.

Purpled laughs. “Is that all you got?” It isn’t. Purpled pushes his body to slam Tommy down, grabbing his head, to shove it to the side. Tommy ducks under the arm, and pulls his fist forward, to collide it with his chest. He grabs his arm and notices his undefended left side, to deliver a throw.

Purpled laughs, and hisses. “Fuck you.”

Tommy takes the moment of pain to throw himself over, and pin his arms down, keeping his legs steady. Purpled shakes under him, and he must hold him down.

“Weapons?” Purpled then grits out after a momentary struggle.

“Fine,” Tommy doesn’t mind. “But keep the couch clean.”

“The first one’s blood on it, loses,” Tommy reaches for the knife on the table, to throw at him. He staggers, standing upwards, and wipes his bottom lip with the back of his hand. There is a small trail of blood, but he ignores the bleeding as Purpled stands.

Purpled is not informed that knives are Tommy's forte, which is one of the reasons why the boy agreed in the first place. He ducks as Purpled charges almost immediately, sweeping the weapon between his fingers as he pulls Purpled's arm, and twists it behind his back. His knife spins, juggling by his fingertips. It is almost like another finger, as he treats it with delicateness and precocious. As if it is a part of him, and untouchable.

Purpled does seem shocked as Tommy uses his advantage with skill. He crashes down on the boy, lifting the knife to Purpled's chin – knifepoint. But Purpled is swift and pulls Tommy's shirt, for him to be shoved down, before Purpled grabs his back, to shove him down to the ground, with him. Purpled grabs his knife, and Tommy feels his sweat rolling off his face to the floorboards.

He refuses to let Purpled win. He throws the knife then, his back from Purpled and his body on the floor, and it misses the edge of his ear by a quarter of an inch. Purpled stands there, blinking with the wind of the weapon pressing against his face as he realizes what Tommy has done.

"What the fuck?" Purpled deadpans.

"You said we could use the weapons," Tommy breathes in and out, deeply as he regains his breaths.

"You fucker," Tommy knows what Purpled had meant – to use the knife as a defense, as they are once taught. To keep it with them, and take advantage of it against the opponent, without ever needing to use it in the first place.

"You have good aim," Purpled then admits. "But there is a hole in the wall."

The boys laugh. Sapnap strolls in later, halting when he notices the mess they have made.

He scowls. "I left you both for twenty minutes." He jabs his finger at the wall. "What the fuck?" He turns to them, and his face is bright red. "Tommy," he deadpans.

"It wasn't me!" Tommy lies.

"Your face," Sapnap groans. "It's bleeding."

Tommy touches his face, and more blood appears on his hand. Sapnap whisks him away, to the kitchen. He forces him to sit on the counter and throws a cloth his way. "You're explaining this to Dream."

Tommy's words are muffled by the cloth against his face. He removes it to speak. But Sapnap saunters next to him and presses it again by his bottom lip. "No, I'm not," he ends up saying, hushed.

"There's a hole in the wall," Sapnap says in disbelief. "Now I get why Philza took the knives from you."

"You're a bitch," Tommy grumbles. "Bitch."

"Hurtful," Sapnap rolls his eyes. "Let me find a Band-Aid."

"I don't need one."

"You're bleeding," Sapnap reasons and Tommy sighs, tipping his head to stare at the roof in annoyance. Purpled comes in after, watching both with question. He still stands awkwardly in the room, unsure what to do with himself.

“What’s going on?” Purpled asks.

“Tommy’s bleeding,”

“So?” Purpled questions.

Sapnap scoffs. “You both need to be taught safety. And no fighting indoors, what were you two doing?”

“Sparring,” they both say, and Sapnap mumbles, “of course,” under his breath.

“You’re the last person who should talk about safety, Sapnap,” Purpled walks over to lean his arms on the countertop. Tommy chucks the cloth to the side and jumps down to rummage through the fridge. “And the last person who should talk about fighting indoors. You’re very hypocritical.”

“I forgot about how much of a nuisance you are,”

“You missed me,”

Tommy glances at Sapnap. “When are you going to explain this, or am I going to be left clueless for longer?”

“When Quackity and Punz return from their meeting,” Sapnap promises. “There isn’t much to explain, really.”

“I was taken by The Academy and hidden. Punz found me and Sapnap thought I was dead until today. And he cried when he saw me.”

“You could have told me that,” Tommy rolls his eyes in his brother’s direction.

“That is a very simplified version that cuts out many details,” Sapnap corrects Purpled. “But I guess that is what happened.”

“So, what’s going to happen now, then?” Tommy asks.

“I’ll help,” Purpled confirms. “I’ll help you guys take down The Academy.”

There is a glimpse of freedom in Purpled’s eyes that both former assassins notice. Freedom for himself, for his friends, and for the students that remain at the institution with their liberty stripped and stolen. Purpled wants to free them and make sure others suffer.

“Your choice,” Sapnap shrugs and gives him an option. Purpled is not used to options, he will not be as he grows up on obligations and strict guidelines that force him into routines and choices that he cannot make himself. “It’s all your choice.”

“I want to,” Purpled confirms. His eyes are a mirror to the fire of Sapnap’s eyes, Tommy notices well.

“Then we’ll do that.”

They go to the living room after Sapnap throws them chips and packets of snacks. They sit on the couch, Sapnap sitting in between the two, although Purpled sits as away as he can. Sapnap turns on a movie, and they end up bickering throughout it.

“This is a horrible movie,” Purpled grumbles. “Sapnap, could you have chosen something worse?”

"I agree," Tommy points. "You can't consider them assassins. Poor criminals at most."

"Shut up," Sapnap pushes Tommy's shoulder. "I have good taste in movies."

"No, you don't," the two teenagers say and Sapnap rolls his eyes.

"I already regret letting you two meet."

Dream returns halfway through the movie. The apartment door rattles, and he stumbles in, his eyes furrowed and anger evident on his features, as he storms into the room.

He throws a finger in Sapnap's face. "Why the fuck did you not return my calls?"

"What?" Sapnap turns, eyebrows raised.

"I told you to return my calls," Dream groans. "And to make actual food,"

Tommy grins and hands his brother an opened packet of chips. "Do you want some?"

Dream groans again. "Tommy, you can't live on chips and snacks."

"Blame Sapnap,"

"Oh, I am," Dream grits his teeth. His eyes then meet Purpled's and then greeted with the hole on the other side of the room.

Tommy watches Dream go through ten emotions in a span of five seconds.

"Sapnap," Dream inhales. "Go to the kitchen."

"Dream—"

"*Sapnap*," Dream repeats and Sapnap raises his arms in surrender, standing to walk out. Dream fixes his posture and glances at the two boys. "You're Purpled," he says, but it is not a question.

"Yeah," Purpled gulps and Tommy notices how he grips the armrest tightly, to the point his knuckles are white.

"Okay," Dream exhales slowly. "Okay." His eyes meet Tommy, and the boy can't look fast away enough for Dream to not notice the Band-aid on his lip.

He leaves the room after that. "Have fun with your movie,"

Tommy turns to Purpled immediately. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Although Purpled looks anything but. "Can we just finish the movie?"

"Sure," Tommy nods slowly and grabs the remote to resume it. They faintly hear Dream's shouting in the background, but his voice is drowned out as the voices of the characters become louder as Tommy increases the volume. From the corner of his eye, he still notices Purpled, on edge.

Purpled notices him watching. "It's so strange," he sighs.

"Yeah?"

"Everything's so different."

Tommy nods, unsure if Purpled will continue speaking or not. His eyes are on the TV, but his mind is elsewhere. The sounds around them are distant, as their thoughts fill the sounds of the air.

“It’s been years since I left,” Purpled then states. “But I remember it all as if it were yesterday.”

All Tommy can do is agree.

“Maybe, it’s because it’s all we can remember. Because we didn’t have a past before life there.” Purpled shrugs. “Well, we did, but we won’t ever remember it again.”

“Yeah,”

“I thought The Academy made me strong,” Purpled sighs. “But I feel weak whenever I think about it.”

“I don’t think...” Tommy wraps his arms around his legs as he struggles to find the proper words. “I don’t think you’re weak. I think they made us feel powerless.”

They reflect on his words.

“Maybe you’re right,” Purpled nods. “Yeah. I shouldn’t feel like it – especially when I saw Dream. But I remember the classes and the exercises he thought, and I remember–” Purpled’s hands turn into tight fists. Tommy understands. Purpled remembers how it feels to be powerless, to have nothing. To be controlled by everyone around you, by strings. Purpled remembers Dream’s classes, and he remembers Dream’s power when all he could do was stand and watch. “–and I remember how he was like. And how powerless he made me feel.”

“He’s not like that anymore,”

“I know,” Purpled says. “Well, I don’t know.”

“I used to kill people,” Tommy stares at his palms. “I killed people. Children. Teenagers. Parents.”

“What?” Purpled asks. “Didn’t you leave before you turned sixteen?” Before he became a Graduate - before they became proper assassins and were valued to perform tasks for their superiors.

“I started earlier,” Is all Tommy says.

“Oh,” Purpled sighs.

“Yeah,”

“I used to think I didn’t have anyone to relate to,” Purpled turns to him. “But I guess now I have you and Sapnap.”

“I’m sorry you were alone for so long,” Tommy should not take Sapnap and Dream for granted. He has them, he once had George, and he was truly never alone.

“I wasn’t, though. I had Punz when I left – when he found me,” Purpled’s eyes spin with memories. “He didn’t understand much at the start, but he learned.”

They turn off the movie and talk. Purpled talks about Punz, and how he couldn’t understand him for a while. Purpled talks about he didn’t understand him either – how everything was weird or foreign. Like learning another language. Only this time, he wasn’t forced to, and the process was slow.

“Do you think you’ll ever search for your family?” Purpled gazes at Tommy, and his purple eyes glow.

Tommy gulps. “Uh – what?”

“Y’know, your family before The Academy?”

“Did Sapnap not tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

“I thought,” Tommy pauses. “He told you everything.”

“He did, well, I thought he did?”

“Philza is my father,” Tommy struggles to say the words. “He uh, the man who runs the other agency – the one who will help Quackity take down The Academy. He’s my father.”

“Sapnap didn’t tell me that,” Purpled’s eyes snap to the door, where there is no echo of sound that comes out from the kitchen. Dream and Sapnap’s argument must have finished. “Let’s go.” He stands.

“What are we doing?”

“Sapnap’s keeping shit from me,” Purpled glares. “Let’s go.” Purpled storms out of the room, and Tommy follows after him.

They go to the kitchen, where Dream leans by a door, and Sapnap is hunched by one of the chairs. Their eyes snap behind them, as the two boys approach them.

“What are you keeping from me?” Purpled’s eyes flicker from Dream’s eyes momentarily, back to Sapnap’s. “You told me – you told me you said everything.”

“I told you I’d explain everything when your brother came back,” Sapnap corrects him. “When Quackity returns.”

“That’s not true,” Purpled denies. “You didn’t fucking say that.”

“Purpled–”

“Why isn’t Tommy with Philza? With his family?”

Tommy stiffens as Dream stares up slowly at Purpled, and Sapnap’s eyes turn angry.

“Tommy?” Dream asks.

“I told him Phil was my father, I didn’t think that was a big deal.”

“It isn’t,” Dream replies.

“Why isn’t he with them?” Purpled blurts out.

“He wants to be with us, Purpled,” Sapnap says softly.

“What?” Purpled blinks, and the red leaves his face. “Why?” he turns to Tommy.

Tommy doesn’t understand why Purpled doesn’t apprehend it.

“Where’s George then?” Purpled interrupts. “What else haven’t you told me Sapnap?”

“I told you, Purpled, we have to wait—”

“Fuck you,” Purpled swears and leaves the kitchen.

“I’ll go after him,” Sapnap rubs his forehead. “Shit.”

“That’s unlike you,” Dream notices. “You’re not this patient.”

“He’s Gray. He changed his name.” From one moment to another, Dream understands. His eyes exchange from confused cloudiness, into understanding.

“That makes sense then,” Dream comprehends. “He was recognizable.”

“I’ll speak to him,” Tommy stops Sapnap as he stands. “It’s okay,”

“It’s okay, Tommy. I caused this in the first place.”

“Trust me, it’s okay,” Tommy nods his head. “Stay here.”

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten you put in a hole in the wall.” He calls after Tommy leaves. “You’re lucky Dream likes you more than me because he ended up shouting at me instead.”

Tommy flips him off, as he leaves. As he opens the door and walks into the hallway by the elevator, he sees Purpled standing by that wall, by the elevator buttons.

“Purpled?” Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “I thought you left.”

“I was waiting for you,”

Tommy glances backward, and then at the purple-eyed boy. “What if it wasn’t me, and Sapnap had come?”

“I had a feeling,” Purpled snorts. “Let’s go.”

They step into the elevator, and Purpled presses the bottom button. They stare into awkwardness as the elevator descends to the ground floor. Then, Purpled walks out and Tommy decides to follow him out.

Luckily, they don’t travel far. On the grounds, Purpled finds a bench and takes out a cigarette and lighter.

“Do you want one?” he offers, and Tommy declines.

“You know,” Purpled presses his lips together, and the lighter in his hand flickers until flame. “I didn’t want to know Punz either. When we first met, I refused to get to know him. He told me he was my brother, and I didn’t accept it for months. I made his life miserable.”

“What does this have to—?”

Purpled interrupts. “I was a bitch, I admit. I’d stay in my room and threaten him if he’d get close. I don’t think he went to sleep for the first couple of months in fear I’d run.”

“Purpled?”

“Tommy,” Purpled blows. “Stop interrupting.” Tommy nods his head quickly. “But then I realized that he did care and that he wanted me to be safe. And that he was family, and I couldn’t take it for granted. He had been searching for me for years and didn’t do anything else with his time. So, I dropped the grudge I held against him, and now I don’t hate him anymore.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Why are you not with Philza?”

Tommy sighs. “I’d prefer to be with Dream and Sapnap.” Tommy trusts them, he’s known them for longer.

“Sure,” Purpled drops the cigarette and presses it against the concrete with his shoe. He then leans back, tilting his head to the clouds. “But did you give him a chance? He’s been looking for you, for years. And now he’s found you – he won’t understand what you’ve been through, but he will try.”

“Okay,” Tommy says plainly.

“I don’t think you understand,” Purpled says, firmer. “But Philza probably wants you back – he wants his son back. And you have Dream and Sapnap, but you have him too. He’s there. It could take months for you to accept that, but I wasted so long holding a grudge against Punz, that I ended up forgetting why I was angry at him in the first place. Don’t make the same mistake. ”

“I’m not *angry* at him,”

“I know you’re not,” Purpled shrugs. “But we’re not used to love at The Academy. And once we have it, we’re clueless.”

Tommy stands, frowning. “You don’t understand.”

“I think I understand pretty clearly.”

“Philza wasn’t looking for me,” Tommy deadpans. “He let me get stolen – if it weren’t for him...” Tommy pauses and Purpled chuckles.

“You can’t finish your sentence because you know well that it’s not his fault. It’s The Academy’s. Philza has been looking for you for years.”

“You act as if you know him,” Tommy’s eyes burn. “You don’t.” Philza doesn’t understand. He takes away his weapons, he’s always watching and asks questions. There is no space, and he always pushes. They all do – Techno and Wilbur too.

“I don’t know him,” Purpled admits. “But if he’s anything like Punz, then I have a good understanding.”

“But–”

“Look, I’ll give you a break. Since you only left a couple months ago, and it took me a long time to accept things,” Purpled stands, and stretches. He pats his shoulder. “It was nice meeting you, Tommy.”

“You’re leaving?” Tommy raises both eyebrows.

“No, I think I need to call Punz back,” Purpled’s face is resigned. “I’ll apologize to Sapnap later. Maybe not, the fucker doesn’t deserve it.”

When Purpled leaves, Tommy slumps on the seat again and stares at the sky. He knows what Purpled said had been right, but he doesn't want to admit it. Because he doesn't want to give Philza another chance when he's content where he is now.

There are a few weeks until the mission, Tommy realizes, then. A few, not many more.

Philza had lost Tommy – *Theseus* once. Tommy realizes that he will lose him again, after the mission.

(Because Tommy prepares for the inevitable.

Tommy prepares for death.)

He decides he will speak to Philza. Wilbur and Techno too – if he must. He will give them a final chance before the mission arrives.

Before the mission arrives, and he is gone.

Chapter End Notes

exams coming up so updates will slowen
thanks for reading and commenting <3

george next chapter maybe maybe not
(so you guys are prepared lmao)

Traitor

Chapter Summary

George kills.

He murders.

He also lives.

Chapter Notes

sorry for the wait :) main exams are over so i finally got the chance to write extra long update for the wait

recap of last chapters: sapnap reconciles with purpled, and purpled meets tommy. purpled asks him why he doesn't speak to philza/his family and tommy reflects - deciding he'll talk to them. however, quackity hasn't told any of them about purpled's existence, and how he is formally from the academy - so dteam and tommy wait for him to return.

this recap sucked so if you want read the last chapter again :)) hope you enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“George,” Dream whispers under the stars.

“*Dream*,” George whispers back.

The moon is a familiar sight, as he rests awake. The wind presses his cold palms and when he breathes out, there is a soft fog that glistens his view. The night is dark, and he hears Dream in his memories, and the conversation they have years ago.

“I don’t understand,” Dream admits.

“Then don’t.”

“But I want to, I *want* to understand why I feel like this, George,” Dream has never sounded so

unsure – so vulnerable and emotional. “When I look at you – I need to know why I *feel*.”)

George smiles and his eyelids flutter closed. He anticipates snow soon.

Until then, the grass remains littered with leaves and the branches on trees are thin and lifeless. Winter arrives in a few days, and George realizes it has been weeks of this – of freedom. It does not feel that way, although. George wants to get used to it for longer until his burdens catch up and he is left in the confinement of his life of before.

George has a lifetime ahead of him, to do whatever he pleases. Years and years of life, he wonders when he will finish aging. When his body will catch up and he will remain forever young in a world that grows old.

It is the first day of Winter when George travels to California.

He takes three buses and rents a car. A small one, as he has nothing to his name beside a tiny duffle bag with two sets of clothes.

Every passing day, the voice in his mind becomes louder.

It is Dream’s voice.

“George,” he says.

“George,” he says, again.

“*George.*”

He is startled and he jolts. His fingers feel another touch of skin and his body feels a familiar warmth with him. Instead, he remains by the coldness of loneliness as Dream is not here and he is alone.

He finds a hotel room for a night and buys a computer. (Not with his own money, of course.)

And he researches.

Sleep is irregular for George. He can sleep for days straight, and then stay up for weeks. It is an irregular pattern, but it does not matter when freedom is placed in his cold palms, allowing him to do as he pleases.

George assumes it is because of the tests done on him, that make him this way. (It makes sense after all. Once, his sleeping is good. He falls asleep and wakes up at six sharp the following morning.)

Fatigue sets into him on the third day awake. He is busy with papers and flashing screens when he realizes his brain shut down slowly. He collapses on the cheap hotel mattress, and when he wakes up, three evenings have passed.

George also wakes up to a weird feeling.

The hairs on his back rise and his ears ring.

He leaves after that.

Gathering his disregarded notebooks on the small kitchen table and his computer, he drives away. As he does, he considers the feeling on his back – and wonders what it is.

(His mind momentarily goes to the tracking device. But he recalls getting rid of it – cutting his skin open and throwing the device into flames. He does not scar, the skin replenishes.)

George drives to an empty parking lot, two hours away. He buys dinner from the nearby gas station, and a baseball cap. He scrolls through his phone for the next hour, his eyes flickering upwards every so often. George ends up taking out his computer again and continuing with his research.

It is not easy, what he does. But it's manageable. He researches an agency he recalls the name of – one he remembers faintly at the Contest. (A tournament he is selected to participate in, with Dream, Sapnap, and once – Theseus. It is a battle to the death, and they always win.)

Because George has a feeling that Dream and Sapnap have a plan. He also has a feeling that it's not enough.

The Academy cannot be underestimated, he knows. After it is burned to the floors, they will return with higher precautions and guidelines for their students. George will free every single one of them. So, he knows they need more assistance by their side.

When they do, George will find Sapnap and Dream again. (He can remember Dream's lips and Sapnap's fiery eyes.)

"Soon," he whispers back when he dreams, as the voice returns, "*George.*"

(It is Dream's voice. It is never not.)

Purpled calls Punz.

"I'm sorry," he grumbles into the phone.

"Purpled,"

"I'm sorry," Purpled repeats, through gritted teeth. "I just don't like it when you keep things from me."

"Okay, okay," Punz exhales. *"I'm nearly back at Nevadas. I'll explain everything, but not over the phone."*

"Where did you go?" Purpled then asks.

"I was uh, at the Syndicate."

"Why?"

"I said I'd explain, didn't I?"

Purpled frowns. "Fuck you."

"Head back home, I'll be there soon."

Purpled blinks. "You finish at eleven, though." Punz's hours aren't good, not with how much he does for Quackity. But he gets paid a lot, so Purpled assumes it is worth it.

"I'm finishing early, just get home, kid."

Purpled complies and ends the call, stuffing his phone in his pocket. He makes it home and waits for Punz who returns around half an hour later. He wears his uniform, and his hair is combed to the side, which makes him appear older than he really is.

Punz surveys Purpled up and down when he enters the door, and his body deflates slightly.

"You're here,"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"You're attracted to danger, Purpled. Something was bound to happen."

Purpled flips his brother off, while Punz leaves to throw his bags in his room. He makes sandwiches and they talk. "We were at the Syndicate's because Quackity was negotiating with them."

"About what?"

"I'll start from the beginning. I think you have more burning questions I should answer."

Every answered question, Purpled's shoulders deflate a little and his heart slows slightly. It is comforting, the answers. As Punz explains that Dream is here because he escaped – Purpled feels better. Although Sapnap has explained it to him, confirmation goes a long way.

"You knew him," Punz notes as he takes peanut butter out of the fridge.

"He was an instructor. He was brutal."

"What did he do?" And Punz's words suddenly have heat and harshness.

"You wouldn't be able to touch him," Purpled rolls his eyes. "He's too strong. And fast."

"I'd fucking try."

"You'd fail," Purpled corrects him. "Sapnap was my brother at The Academy. The only person I could rely on, and trust."

"Really?" Punz raises a sharp eyebrow and takes out the bread.

"Yeah," Purpled confirms and gazes away. He does not talk often about his past with his brother, but the conversations are present from time to time. Punz listens while Purpled talks. But right now, Purpled wants Punz to speak. "So Quackity's taking down The Academy? Why couldn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know when to," Punz admits. "You're only settling at school and have enough things to worry about."

"That isn't the real reason," Purpled surveys his face and notices how Punz's eye twitches and he

rubs his nose. He does the action when he lies. Punz can't possibly think he can get through him, not when Purpled was trained to understand and pick up the gestures.

"How much peanut butter do you want?" Punz ignores his question, as he grabs a knife.

"Don't ignore my question,"

Punz drops the knife in the jar and smothers it all on the bread. "Toasted?"

"Fuck off."

Punz sighs. "I couldn't tell you because I didn't know at the time if we'd be there to help him."

"Help who?" Purpled is confused. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't know if we'd help Quackity."

Purpled furrows his eyebrows. "Why wouldn't you? You're his bodyguard."

"He'd understand if I wouldn't want to commit to the mission," Punz states as he cuts the pieces of bread. "You know I'm not tied down to my job, Purpled. I don't have to do anything I don't want to do."

Purpled gulps. "Yeah, yeah, I know that dumbass."

"Okay good," Punz turns his back from him, to take out a plate. As he opens a cabinet, he hesitates and probably rolls his eyes. "Drop the knife, Purpled."

Purpled rolls his eyes and his hand which extends to grab the kitchen knife falls by his side. He frowns. "I wasn't doing anything."

Punz turns with the plates, and places one of the sandwiches on them, handing it to him. Purpled thanks him under his breath. "Why wouldn't you want to tell Quackity though? I thought you always wanted to take down The Academy." Punz has always had the glare in his eyes, the sight of spite and vengeance. He wants revenge for what they have done to him and their past. "You trust him, don't you?"

"I don't trust many people."

Purpled picks up his sandwich. "But you trust him. Otherwise, you wouldn't have taken the job."

"I trust Quackity as a person. I don't trust his motives or morals."

"That doesn't make any fucking sense."

"Quackity's a good person," Punz sighs. "But his actions aren't."

Purpled's former actions aren't good either. But he doesn't believe he's a good person – because he's done them, and they've shaped him for who he is.

"I see that look in your eyes. Get rid of it," Punz demands, and Purpled scowls. "Quackity is a good person, I just don't trust him with what he'll do with The Academy students. He's always wanted to grow his agency, it's his main goal. So, I don't doubt for a second that he'll use them for his personal gain."

Purpled heart stops for a moment when he processes the words. "What?" he barely says.

“He’ll use those kids for his own benefit, to build his agency and grow.” Punz sighs. “It’s what he wants the most, power and money. Mostly power.”

Purpled cannot speak.

“This is why I didn’t tell you,” Punz sighs. “Because I’m not helping him.”

“You have to stop him,” Purpled declares.

“I know, I know,” Punz nods. “I informed Philza.”

Purpled blinks. “Tommy’s father?”

“How do you know that?”

Punz raises an eyebrow as Purpled explains. “I spoke to him today.”

Punz mutters. “Of course, you did.” He also says, “Philza informed Quackity that he was out of the alliance today after I told him. Since it’s off – Quackity has to figure out another plan and it gives us a little more time.”

“The agency is big,” Purpled reasons. “Who won’t say Quackity won’t go ahead without Philza?”

“His ego’s big so he won’t admit he needs the help. But he does, he knows it – we all do.”

Purpled snorts. “You really betrayed him.”

“I told you, Purpled, I don’t trust many people.”

“You told me you trusted Quackity?”

Punz smiles. “I trust him, I told you. I don’t trust his motives.”

Purpled finishes his sandwich, thinking. “But you trust, Philza?”

“Huh?”

“I get you don’t trust Quackity,” Purpled says. “But you trust Philza? Are his intentions any better – is he better than Quackity?”

“Philza doesn’t want to take down The Academy and use those children.”

“You trust him,” Purpled smirks.

“I did not say that, Purpled.”

“You trust Philza enough to side with him over the guy who you’ve been working for, for years,” Purpled rolls his eyes. “Don’t get me wrong,” he then says after Punz sends him ‘that’ look. (The one he reserves for him specifically) “I trust you, but I don’t know if any of these guys are better than each other.”

Punz stays quiet and Purpled looks up from the table. “What?” He squints his eyes, confused when Punz just stares at him.

“Say that again,” his voice is weirdly quiet.

“I don’t know if any of them are better than each other?”

Punz smiles, “No, what did you say before that?”

It takes a while for Purpled to understand. When he does, he jumps off the stool and keeps his eyes focused away from Punz, whose smile widens.

“Purpled,” Punz laughs. “Say that again.”

“No,” Purpled groans. “I didn’t say anything.”

Punz takes a step in his direction and Purpled steps back. “Don’t touch me, freak.”

“You trust me,” Punz grins. “Aw, Purpled.”

“I don’t like you,”

“But you trust me.”

(Purpled has never uttered the words before. He can’t be vulnerable and show honest feelings, especially to Punz.)

“Fine,” Punz smirks with a knowing glance in his eyes. “Sit down.” For once, Purpled sits. “I’ll tell you Purpled, but you can’t tell anyone.”

“Who would I tell?”

“I know you’re talking to Tommy, and there’s Sarnap. You can’t tell either of them.”

“Sure, sure.”

“Quackity used to be a part of Philza’s agency,” Punz says carefully, his eyes surveying the room as if someone else is listening. “He betrayed them and was kicked out.”

“How’d he betray them?”

“I don’t exactly know. But I do know that Quackity rides off revenge – he’ll do anything to make sure that he ends up on top.”

“So, you’re saying that this was never about taking The Academy down for Quackity, but one-upping Philza?”

“Not one-upping,” Punz denies. “But something did happen.”

“But–”

“Look, kid,” Punz says. “I don’t know what’s going on with Quackity. But I refuse to let him do anything to those kids there. What I do know is that Philza will stop him. He understands the situation better than anyone else, considering Tommy was his kid – he wants revenge on the people who run that place, and won’t let Quackity get in the way of that.”

“Tommy doesn’t like Philza,” Purpled replies. “Well, he doesn’t want to live with him.”

“Yeah, I know. Tommy doesn’t know the measures Philza would go for him – he doesn’t know what Quackity’s planning either. None of them do, but we have to figure something else out before telling them.”

“Okay,” Purples accepts. “Okay.”

Before Purpled leaves the room, Punz adds, “Just so you know, Phil isn’t the only one who wants revenge for what they did.”

Purpled rolls his eyes. “I know that.” (Once, Purpled does not know. He does not know the measures that Punz would go for him.)

“Good,” Punz smirks. “I can’t wait to tear that place to the fucking ground.”

Quackity remembers love and a family.

He forgets.

He forgets how it feels for his heart to race and his chest to hurt with worry. He forgets how it feels to have another hand in his, another smile like his own, and a family he can call his own.

Philza kills Quackity’s family and when he is left with the memories of their faint smiles and soft laughter, they disappear too.

One day, Quackity rests under the shadow of the moon and realizes.

(His memories are gone.)

He spirals, afterward.

Karl is gone – and he has not spoken or seen Sapnap in months. So Quackity is the most alone he has ever been, and his old memories cannot accompany him as they disappear. Philza takes them away from him – he takes it all away until he is left with nothing.

Quackity’s palms shake and his eyes struggle to open. He wishes to feel love, he wishes to feel it all over again. But the feeling is gone like his memories, and he is left alone with an emptiness that grows.

He screams at the moon, then. He throws a beer bottle and when glass cuts his hands and skin, is the moment he realizes everything is *wrong*. His hands bleed and he screams until his voice is hoarse.

He cries.

Quackity misses love – the feeling of being loved.

He never has a mother. She leaves after he is born. His father did not love him, not as much as Quackity had loved him. But he had a younger sister, whom he loved until his heart hurt. And Philza takes her – Philza kills her because of Quackity’s disloyalty.

To prove a point, they say, and Techno cut his eyes open.

(Quackity has the ax that Technoblade discards when he blinds him. He keeps it hidden, behind his bookshelves in his office.)

So, he decides between moments of loneliness, to make sure Philza is more alone than he feels then. He will take away the people he loves – and he will whisper the words, *'to prove a point'* as Philza can only watch.

Months after bleeding hands and a hoarse throat, Quackity remembers a boy called Theseus.

(Nights ago, years away, Quackity recalls Philza admitting that he has a missing son. He says his name is Theseus.)

Theseus, Philza's son who is gone. *Theseus*, Philza's son who Quackity will find and take away as Philza had done with his sister, whom he no longer remembers.

(He will show Philza, what it is like to have family taken away. For love to become nothing but an echo.)

So Quackity finds Theseus. He will find him and hopes vengeance tastes bitter.

Quackity comes back at midnight.

Dream stands at his presence, others staying seated.

"Quackity," Dream deadpans as Quackity walks in, scrolling through his phone. Tommy notices how his face is red, and his white sleeves are rolled, sensing distress – an urgency.

Dream must notice it too; however, he chooses to ignore it. "When were you going to tell us that Punz's brother is from The Academy?"

"What?" Quackity looks up, finally noticing the eyes on him. He raises an eyebrow and sweat covers his forehead. "I didn't know."

"Of course, you fucking did."

"Dream," Sapnap calls, rolling his eyes. "Take a step back."

To Tommy's surprise, Dream does. He gets angry more, but he can control it better. "Quackity."

"I honestly didn't know," Quackity shoves his phone in his pocket and throws his black blazer onto his desk. "I told Punz to keep his personal life away from work, and I'd do the same. Safety precautions and all."

"You really didn't know?" Sapnap's voice is not as accusing as Dream's, but it isn't calm either.

"I really didn't."

“Where is Punz?” Tommy speaks up, noticing the lack of presence of the bodyguard. Well, he notices almost immediately but pipes up about the concern now that the argument ends.

“I told him to go home. He did mention his brother, now that I remember,” Quackity shrugs, carelessly. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Purpled,” Dream confirms, nodding his head. “Ask Punz to bring him over.”

“I can’t do that, Dream. What about fucking safety precautions do you not understand?” Quackity snaps.

“Are you okay, Q?” Sarnap stands and walks over Dream. “You seem stressed. Well, more stressed than usual.”

“I’m fine,” Quackity says, while anything but fine. “Fuck no, I’m not. Philza’s pulled out.”

“What?” Sarnap and Dream shout.

“He’s pulled out of the agreement,” Quackity growls. “He’s completely out.”

“The fuck?!”

“There is a traitor,” Quackity growls. “I went to negotiate with him today, to see if there was any chance, we could reconcile – but he somehow knows more – someone told him *shit* and he refuses to cooperate.”

“Who is it?” Sarnap glares. “Who told him?”

Quackity collapses on his chair. “It doesn’t matter – it doesn’t *matter* Sarnap.”

“It does,” Sarnap glares. “Because if there is one of your people talking to him and telling him everything we know, then we won’t go anywhere. So, you have to figure this out.”

“Me?” Quackity exclaims incredulously. “That’s my job?”

“You told me you’d handle this, and I trusted you, Quackity.”

“Trusted?” Quackity scoffs.

“Okay, okay,” Now it’s Dream’s turn to interrupt, placing a hand on Sarnap’s shoulder to physically stir him back. “We’ll figure something out.”

“I’ll talk to him,” Tommy then stands. “I’ll convince him.”

“No,” Three different voices return at him.

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “Why not?”

“We aren’t having a repeat of what happened last time,” Dream reminds him, with a knowing glance in his eyes. Tommy does not forget the panic attack he has the last time he is with the Syndicate. “I doubt you’ll convince him either, Tommy. He’s found out Quackity betrayed him, so there’s no going back from here.”

Tommy notices something inside of Quackity flinch.

“Instead, we’ll call a meeting. We’ll figure something out. But we need Purpled here, Quackity. I

have a feeling Purpled won't return if Punz says no."

"Why do we need Purpled here?" Quackity asks with exhaustion sweeping into his words.

"He can help at least, there's only a few of us who know the full extent of what The Academy does," Dream explains. "Maybe he knows something that we don't."

"We can't rely on him," Quackity rolls his eyes. "And we clearly can't rely on Philza each other. We won't be calling a meeting."

"What?" Tommy interrupts. "Why not?"

"I don't trust him."

"You never trusted him," Dream scowls. "What the fuck are you saying, Quackity? We're weeks away – we're so close."

"Philza does not trust me, and I don't trust him," Quackity stands. "What part of that do you not understand, Dream?" He moves to leave the room, leaving the three assassins standing in the room, glancing incredulously at him.

"So what?" Sarnap asks, hurt in his tone.

"What?" Quackity asks.

"What are you going to do?"

"What am *I* going to do?" Quackity scoffs as he moves to open the door. "I don't fucking know."

He leaves them, wordless.

Tommy reflects on his words.

A traitor, Quackity has said. But his main point focuses on trust – a lack of trust between him and Philza, leaving the plan behind them. Phil knows that Quackity plans to betray him, so Philza leaves their alliance. And everything falls apart.

"Well, shit," Tommy mutters. He glances at Dream, whose eyes are on Sarnap.

"Sarnap," Dream then says. "What do you want to do?"

"Why the fuck are you asking me?" Tommy sees a familiar flame within him, as he fights back Dream's simple question, the singular query. "You're the one with the plan. You fucking decide."

"I'm leaving it up to you," Dream says plainly.

"Fuck," Sarnap collapses on the couch. "He's sometimes like this. When I first met him, I noticed it when Karl did. He gives up on motions and steps back – pushes others away. I don't know why he's like this though – I assumed he'd fight Phil or be more persistent."

"So, you think something else happened, that he's not telling us?" Dream rubs his chin.

"Probably. He rarely confides in Karl and me. He's keeping whatever happened to himself." Sarnap pauses. "He said Philza is completely out, now. So, he knows more to the plan – somehow."

“Our plan was to betray him and find the new location without him knowing,” Dream blinks.
“What more is there to the plan?”

They do not know.

“Punz was there,” Tommy points out. “He’d know,” Quackity tells Punz everything – that, and Punz hears everything, being with him so often. If anyone knows what happened between Philza and him – then it’s Punz.

“Would Punz tell us though?”

Tommy nods his head, hesitantly. “Punz has Purpled – we know that know.” They know that they’re brothers. That Punz understands what it feels to have someone close, fall victim to The Academy. “Since this bullshit affects Purpled in a way, he’ll want the plan to go on.”

“The kid’s right,” Sapnap nods and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“Shut up.”

Sapnap continues, “Punz will tell us, especially if Quackity is going to delay the mission with whatever the fuck is going on.”

“We’ll bring in Purpled and Punz in then,” Dream states. “Which won’t be too difficult.”

“I’ll tell Karl,” Sapnap stands but Dream stops him, fast.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Dream denies.

“He’s my boyfriend,” Sapnap says slowly, under his breath, as if Dream has forgotten. “Why wouldn’t I tell him?”

“Quackity’s also his boyfriend,” Dream sighs.

“Karl won’t tell Q–”

“Someone told Philza,” Dream interrupts. “Someone told Philza, and I won’t take any chances. So, it stays between us. Got that, Tommy?”

Tommy nods his head, and Dream raises his eyebrows at Sapnap.

“Fine,” he grumbles.

George wakes up, out of breath.

“*George*,” his mind screams and he is met by the faces of his past kills. Their eyes are white and blood stains their mouths, their ears bleeding with crimson. They scream and startle him, and they

ask him why he is a killer.

They ask George why he causes death but will forever live.

Between their faces, is Dream. His mask is on, but his body is sheer white. “*George*,” he repeats and George stumbles out of the car, his chest heaving and his eyes on fire. He throws up into bushes near his car, and his chest rises and falls until his breaths slow.

George squeezes his eyes closed and reminds himself that he is George, and he escaped The Academy. He will save the children he has left behind, and he will find his brothers.

(In the white room, when minutes become hours, and the hours become passing days, he repeats his name and Dream’s in his mind. Eventually, he starts saying Sapnap’s name too. He never has to say Theseus’ because he grows out of the white room before he meets him.)

So, the next time, his name is whispered in his mind, he says, “*Dream*,” and the voices vanish.

He walks into the petrol station store, staring at the aisles until his eyes hurt. A man almost falls asleep at the counter, and George swipes a packeted sandwich before he leaves. He sits on the hood of his car as he stomachs the food until his hairs rise and his ears ring. He turns his head and feels eyes on him.

Someone is following him, he knows. He feels someone.

George drives out of the petrol station parking lot afterward, his eyes on the rear mirror, and his attention on the roads. He waits for a car to appear behind him. There are lights in the distance, and his heart thumps against his chest as he realizes that he’s finally been found.

George refuses, however. He refuses to be found by The Academy. He refuses to go back.

He locates the nearest hotel he can find. It’s a good thing, he can multitask – and drive, as well.

(To be honest, George could outdrive the follower. But that doesn’t seem like too much fun for him.)

One thing that everyone gets wrong about him, is that he is calm and collected. But his heart races and his ears ring loudly, and George wonders if he’d ever be able to tell Theseus that he isn’t as chilled as he seems. He keeps the mask on his expression and does not allow anyone else to notice his emotion because that is a weakness, and George disallows any mention of them.

His blank expressions give him an advantage, however. As Dream is feared due to his prestigious title, and Sapnap’s stories are spoken of by the younger years, George has cold and calculated eyes that stir others away.

So as the car follows behind him, he reminds himself of the assassin he once was (and will never be again) and acts.

The hotel approaches and he parks close to the entrance. His eyes scan the roads, and he counts in his mind.

On the tenth second, he enters the building.

“Good evening, sir,” the receptionist welcomes him. “Do you have a reservation?” She glances at him up and down with an uneasy expression. After all, George isn’t wearing the most formal clothes. His hoodie is dirty, and his pants are old.

“I don’t,” he leans forward and stares into her blue eyes. “I want one room, first floor.”

“We have a great view of the city if you’re interested,” she smiles. The number in George’s mind increases and he must hurry.

“First floor is fine. Thanks.”

She hands him a key with an uneasy smile, double-taking as he does not drink any suitcases with him. He marches in and waits for the feeling of eyes on him before he enters the hallway to his room.

When George shoves the metal key in the lock, he has counted to two hundred and fifty-three. It is at three hundred when the voices begin again and three hundred and ten when the door rattles and shakes.

As he grabs three knives from the kitchen, all varying in length, he hears his name being called. He shoves the door open and grips the front of the black-suited man in front of him, throwing him into the room, before he locks the door behind him.

The man does not stumble, and George realizes they have sent one of their best agents after him.

Of course, they have. He is Graduate Two after all.

“George,” they say as George stares at them up and down, the agent standing straight. “You’ll return with me, to The Academy.”

“Good luck,” he says, blankly.

The agent takes out a gun and George assesses their body language – their present weaknesses that he can pinpoint immediately.

“I have a gun, George,” they say. “I’ve been following you for days,”

“Yet, I opened the door for you,” George smiles.

“Fine,” The agent says and runs to him. George ducks as they swing, and he feels the blood pumping through his body and his mind settles into the element of who he once was, and who he promised not to be again. But he will not kill, not yet anyway.

He is Graduate Two.

They raise their gun.

“George,”

George raises his elbow and shoves the gun out of his hands.

The agent grabs their gun from their pocket and swipes under.

“George,”

George grabs. He pulls their arm and twists his body left.

They fall.

“George,”

George falls after, swiftly kneeling his knee on his stomach, as he punches him in the jaw.

They grab his arm and pull him over. George feels sweat and blood. He realizes late that there is a knife in his side, and he bleeds.

The agent uses his injury, to aim for his bad side. George does not lose a fight, not to someone who is not Dream. So, he pulls the knife out of his side, and grunts as his body adjusts. He swipes it over at the agent's arm, a faint smirk when the man cowers and soon stumbles.

"You fuck," he coughs when he realizes George has taken out the knife and stabbed it into him instead. George takes his momentary shock, to finish the fight, and swings for his side, pulling his head down and kicking him backward.

The agent passes out.

When the agent wakes up, he is tied to a chair. George stands near him, stitching up his side.

The agent tries to escape. They pull against the chair. But George has cuffed his arms behind the chair and found enough rope to tie his legs together. His weapons are taken from him. But George has fixed the wound on his arm.

He's improving. He isn't as ruthless as he once was.

(He's still ruthless, though.)

"Fuck," the agent says. "Fuck."

"Eight," George nods, having seen the number on his wrist once he was stitching his arm as they laid unconscious.

"I'm a Graduate," they scowl.

George bites his tongue. "Okay then,"

"You think you're better than everyone else," They spit. "Graduate Two."

"You can call me George," George responds. He finishes his stitches and fills a glass with water. "Do you want something to eat?"

"Fuck you,"

"Okay then," He slumps down in the chair opposite him, his fingers tracing around the rim of the glass cup. "Do you want to start talking?" At a lack of response, he leans back. "I'll let you go. Eventually. The sooner you start talking, the faster we'll get on our way."

George sighs when they refuse to speak. He takes out a knife and watches as their eyes widen.

"Don't worry," he says politely. "I'm just sharpening it."

As he does, the man coughs. "What do you need to know?"

"That was fast,"

"I'd not prefer a slow death."

(As agents, they wonder how their death will be.

They can only hope it's fast and painless.)

"I'm not killing you," George mutters.

"Why the fuck not?"

"I don't do that,"

The man laughs. "Sure, you don't,"

"How old are you?" George wants to know.

"Eighteen," Two years older than Theseus. Two years into being a Graduate. "And you're twenty-one."

George blinks. "Uh,"

"We are informed everything," Eight says. "You're twenty-one and your weakness is armed combat. You'll pinpoint my weaknesses the moment you look at me and if I mention Dream and Sapnap – you'll flinch."

George does not flinch.

(Maybe he almost does.)

Eight grins and George sees his bloody teeth for the first time. He may have punched him too hard. "We are told everything about you. There are ten of us."

"Ten?" George raises his eyebrows.

"They sent ten agents out for you. And somehow, I was the one that found you."

"You'll tell me everything you know and everything they told you. Then I'll let you go," George promises. "I will."

"You won't," Eight says. "And it doesn't matter if you do."

"What?"

Eight points at his shoulder with his chin. "They put devices into us. After three weeks, it injects poison and kills us."

"How long has it been, then?"

"Two," they say. "And a half."

George watches their empty eyes and realizes what faces him is resignation.

"I'll take it out then," George sighs. "It's just a device?" He has knives in the kitchen and enough material to stitch it up again.

"If I try, it'll alert them," Eight says. "They'll locate this area and figure out you were here. They're close, George."

"That's fine, I have time," *I have time, but you don't*, George wants to say.

He does not form attachments, nor does he care.

But he sees fear in the man in front of him, who isn't a man – a boy, as he is only eighteen. He is only a boy and George sees himself in him.

"We were told a lot about you," Eight stares. "We were told to be scared and not underestimate you,"

"You did that when we fought,"

"I'm cocky," Eight admits with a shrug. Only his arms are cuffed so he can only awkwardly raise and drop his shoulders. "The Headmaster knows you're aware, they're planning to stop anything from happening."

"I know," George doesn't know, but he can assume.

"Are you going to take them down?"

"That's what I'm planning to do," George grabs a kit from the kitchen and pulls the stool by him.

"How are you going to do it?"

"I'm planning, I have no fucking idea."

"A lot of others tried to escape after you, Sapnap and Dream are now gone. Mainly the other Graduates. They have devices in them now, almost everyone does."

"What else has changed?"

"That's it,"

George nods.

"I'm still confused," Eight sighs. "You know if you killed me, this would be easier for both of us."

"I'm not killing you,"

"Okay then," Eight sighs.

George grabs out the needles and tweezers. He washes his hands again and ties his hair out of his eyes, as it grows longer than it has ever been.

"What are you doing after?" Eight asks. "After you take this out?"

"I've found a few people," George says. "Willing to help me."

"Oh," Eight nods in shock.

George rolls his eyes and watches the boy's expression as his skin is cut open. Eight does not flinch.

George watches as blood sweeps and attempts not to grimace as he sees red again.

"George,"

"Shut up."

Eight furrows his eyebrows. "I didn't say anything."

George blinks and finds a device wedged into blood. “Right, yeah, okay.”

“You’re fucking weird.”

George takes out the device, throwing it into a glass of water as he swiftly stitches the skin together. He does it fast, so it is not his best work, but it will do its job and stay together.

After it is fixed, he steps on the device, and it breaks under his shoe.

“We’ll go now,”

“Where, exactly?”

George shrugs. “Are you coming?”

“Uh, George,” Eight queries and looks down at his legs, which are tied to the chair. “You’ll have to untie me first.”

Once, George does not hesitate.

He does not hesitate when there is a gun to another’s face. He does not hesitate to shoot.

It does not take long for blood to become a familiar sight.

He kills his targets. If he doesn’t, he cuts their fingers and slashes their skin with the letter ‘A’. He tapes their mouth closed and feels nothing.

(George does not ask their name and their age before they die. He does not feel sympathy, he cannot afford to.)

The testing allows him to continue without delay. It changes him and makes him forget about the faces of the people he once kills.

(One day, he finds out Theseus forgets the faces too.

For a single moment in time, George wonders if Theseus is like him. Because they all remember – the agency makes sure they do, because they are monsters, and they cannot forget it.

For a second – he wonders. But he digs the thought deep in his mind and forgets because Theseus would not go through the testing. It would not be possible; he denies the fact.)

George kills.

He murders.

He also lives.

Dream has nightmares.

He watches the people he loves, die. In front of him.

He watches Tommy drown. He sees Sapnap die in the deserts that once held him captive. He also watches George burn alive. However, in every moment, he is frozen and unable to help them.

So, Dream must watch as his world burns.

(He cannot save Tommy from the drowning waters. He cannot save Sapnap from his final mission. He cannot save George, who dies without freedom – without a glance at the liberty past the bricked walls of The Academy.)

When the nightmares force him to feel alive, he leaves his room and leaves the apartment. He takes the elevator to the top floor of the complex, where his feet meet cement, and his eyes meet the sky.

He sits on tiled floors and watches the sky above him. The wind presses against his skin and when he breaths out, the air glitters white.

He closes his eyes and remembers a life of before.

“George,” Dream whispers under the stars.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading!
things are unraveling
tldr for this chapter; hgbnjiuyhgbnjsij

also follow my twitter pls if u want updates on my updates
@pathicsoul

Explosive

Chapter Summary

“I’d say this was a good bonding experience,” Theseus jokes after, and the three’s eyes look over at him slowly.

“What?” Sapnap asks, confused.

“A good bonding experience,” Theseus nods.

“Theseus,” George blinks. “What about this is a bonding experience?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy goes to talk to Philza.

(He knows it’s a reckless idea as soon as he steps into the elevator)

He tells Dream that he’s going down for extra training. Sapnap offers to come with him, but Karl calls him at the exact moment – so Tommy has a few hours. Although Tommy is not sure how long he will need. He will speak to Philza and ask for the answers he needs.

Punz has not shown up to the agency for the past week, and Dream insists on waiting. Tommy knows for certain that Punz will not have all the answers that they are looking for. He also does not have the patience to wait.

He knows that Quackity is hiding something, and Tommy wants to know what.

He is taking the bus out of Nevadas when his phone vibrates. It’s Dream, who asks him what time he’ll return to the apartment, and what he wants for lunch. Tommy stares at the message for a second and almost flinches when he notices the battery decreases.

He responds *I don’t care bitch* and turns off his phone.

The bus ride is long and when Tommy steps off the bus, he realizes how reckless his idea really is. Because he hasn’t seen Philza, Wilbur, and Techno in a while and the last time he did – nothing good happened. He also doesn’t exactly know how to get into the Syndicate. They’ll have security guards, and he isn’t sure if he’ll even be allowed in.

Tommy circles the town, remembering the times he bumps into Wilbur suddenly. Once, when he works at Niki’s bakery, Wilbur becomes a usual face. But he’s around so much, even when Tommy doesn’t expect him.

It is then, that he connects the dots.

He recalls bumping into Wilbur at the sushi shop with Sapnap – unexpectedly. It hadn’t made sense – especially since he lived for and wouldn’t travel so long for sushi. But Tommy remembers that Tubbo hacks and Philza have a security company to hide his true actions from the public.

So, Wilbur uses the security cameras around town to find him. Tommy does not understand why he doesn't realize it sooner.

(He's almost disappointed in himself. Tommy should have figured it out.)

So, he wonders if it will work, pinpointing locations, where he believes eyes will be on him and cameras, will be focused on his direction. He steers through town, his face seen and his back straight. Tommy also hasn't gotten so much freedom in a long time, not when he's been cramped in the agency because of the dangers of leaving. He knows that Dream will be unhappy when he finds out. So, Tommy will be fast and arrive back before lunch.

Tommy's plan does not work, however. Wilbur does not show up.

Of course, he doesn't, Tommy thinks. Why the fuck would he? Wilbur does not care; he has no reason to. Not when Tommy looked away and didn't come back.

Tommy's phone rings. Sapnap calls him. *"How long will you be?"* He asks. *"Karl's gone, so I can come down and train with you now."*

Tommy rolls his eyes. "Finished making out?"

"No," Sapnap quickly denies, almost too instant to be the truth. *"We just talked, that's it."*

Tommy's stomach rumbles and he sees a donut store in front of him. He enters and covers the speaker when the bell chimes as the door close behind him. "Sure, about what?"

"I don't fuckin' remember. Not about Quackity, if that's what you're wondering."

"Well, I wasn't." Tommy stares at the array of donuts. He doesn't think he's seen so many before.

"Dream's making lunch but he's being a bitch about it so hurry up,"

"I think I'm going to do something after I finish," Tommy gulps as he lies. He watches a man in the store, with his son chose a pink donut. "So, I won't be back until dinner."

"What?" Sapnap grows suspicion. *"What the fuck are you doing for so long?"*

Tommy racks his brain. He almost swears when he cannot think of something immediately.

"I'm... hanging out with Purpled?"

"You're what?—"

"My phone's going to die," This isn't a lie this time. "I have to go."

"But Punz—"

"Bye Sapnap," he shoves his phone in his pocket and scowls when he realizes his bad lying. It is the worst thing he could have admitted, because if he's with Purpled, then he's with Punz, who hasn't been at *Las Nevadas* for the last couple of days – so now he's screwed.

"Would you like to order?" The man serving asks, and Tommy nods his head with a reluctant sigh. He grabs a sugary jam-filled donut and eats it by a bench with birds watching him as if he'll give up the rest of his food for them.

One has beady eyes and stares into Tommy's soul. "Fuck off." He mutters and glances away. When he glances back, it stares at him before flying away.

Tommy sits on the bench for a while, clueless. He isn't sure what he's meant to do.

Then he remembers Niki's bakery. The one he used to work at, the one that he technically still does – after leaving without a word.

He knows it's close, walking distance – 10 minutes away. But Tommy also knows that Niki probably doesn't want to see him.

(Scratch that, it's likely definite.)

He decides after courage settles within him, that he will go see Niki. He doesn't know what controls his feet to walk; perhaps it's the thought of seeing her again, or maybe talking to Wilbur. Tommy tells himself that he does not care. Niki is a connection he cannot afford to hold after leaving.

The bakery seems the same as he left it. The flowers at the front dance with the wind and the large wooden signs have a fresh coat of pink paint, glistened by the golden letters. The table at the front is accompanied by a man reading a newspaper, who Tommy nods at as he passes.

The bell chimes when he steps in. He recalls the familiar scent, the fresh bread, and the smell of sweetness.

"I'll be there in a second!" Niki's voice is heard in the backroom and Tommy stills.

Tommy glances around and gulps. He should not have come.

He regrets but Niki returns. She is in a state of franticness and wipes her hands on her apron, walking to the cash register to press a couple of buttons. Tommy assumes she is fixing the money since the metal drawer sometimes gets jammed. He remembers.

"Hello," she smiles politely, still looking down and Tommy holds his breath. "What can I get for you, today?"

She finally glances up and their eyes lock.

Her chin drops and she blinks once, and then again, almost in disbelief.

"Tommy?"

Tommy does not say anything. He doesn't know what to say.

"Tommy," she repeats. "*Tommy.*"

She moves swiftly around, and Tommy holds his breath as she steps forward. He doesn't know why he flinches, but he does. But Niki hugs him, and he lets out the breath he holds. "Tommy," she repeats, her voice very quiet. "Where have you been, kid?"

The image may seem funny to any other bystander. Because Tommy's fairly taller than her, and he hasn't moved to wrap his arms around her, standing like a stick. "Tommy?" she asks again.

"Hey," he replies, unsure.

She scoffs and let's go, but she doesn't look away. Her blond hair is long and tied back. She has a fringe now, but the hat she wears covers it. "You left without telling me. I thought you'd tell me, Tommy,"

"I'm sorry," he apologizes, and she rolls her eyes.

"You should be," she grumbles. "I didn't realize how much you did around here until you left."

"I'm sorry," he repeats, and Tommy doesn't know what else to say. He left without telling her.

Niki then says. "I've been worried."

Tommy gulps. "Uh--"

"Tubbo's worried about you too, really worried."

Tommy's eyes meet her. "You know?" Of course, she knows. She's friends with Wilbur, and Tubbo's sister. If they know that he's Philza's son, then so does she.

"I know," she confirms. "Sit down, I'll make you a hot chocolate."

"I can't be here for long," Tommy admits. Sapnap knows he isn't where he should be, and Dream will catch on soon. He isn't sure when the next bus comes either or doesn't have his phone to check. So, Tommy's pretty screwed.

"You can stay for ten minutes, Tommy," It isn't a question from Niki. Rather, her ocean eyes stare into him and Tommy knows it's a command instead. So, he complies and takes a seat on the stools he remembers sitting on not so long ago.

Tommy doesn't talk, and Niki seems hesitant. Soon though, she dissolves into chatter. "Wilbur's broken the door three more times; I don't know you noticed. But he replaced the last one this time with one with golden handles, so I guess I forgive him."

Tommy does not need to turn around to acknowledge the change. His mind remembers the image in his mind, a perk of being trained into an assassin he supposes.

"I added white chocolate brownies to the menu," Niki smiles and Tommy feels a comfort he hasn't felt in so long. "Would you like to try one?"

Tommy thinks, maybe for a second too long because Niki's smile slightly dampens. "Sure."

There are two on the plate she hands him, instead of one. She also hands a cup of hot chocolate and watches as he takes a bite. "It's good," he says after swallowing. He tastes a hint of raspberry, and the sweetness explodes with the taste of the chocolate. "Yeah, I like it."

"Thanks," Niki smiles. "Tubbo was actually the one to suggest it. Although, it was probably an excuse to eat more brownies." She laughs softly and Tommy agrees silently. The sound of the coffee machine and timer ringing is what Tommy focuses on as he eats the rest of the brownies. He hasn't been able to eat many things sweet because Dream is a health freak and Sapnap can't bake.

Although Tommy knows the questions will come soon. He watches Niki carefully, noticing her hesitation and her eyes on him.

They don't come, however.

Tommy stays surprised.

"I should have told you," he apologizes, truly after a pause. "I'm sorry, Niki."

She pauses too. "I forgive you, Tommy."

He struggles to form words. “You probably already know, but I’m staying as *Las Nevadas* now.”

Niki’s eyes flash. “That’s okay. I was always scared for you, you know. You’re a strange kid.”

“Thanks?”

Niki smirks. “I’m glad you have Dream,”

Yeah, Tommy thinks. *Me too.*

“I have another brother,” Tommy admits because he doesn’t have to hide his life anymore when she will find out anyway. Niki perks up at his words, and her lips part in shock. When he says, “his name is Sapnap,” her lips press down and she stares away.

“Yeah,” she smiles. “That’s nice.”

Niki disappears into the back room for a moment. Tommy finishes his hot chocolate and watches the clock with black handles on the corner wall. He counts his breaths between each second and wonders if he’s living or dreaming.

Niki returns. She leans on the table, and they don’t know what to say.

Tommy points out the obvious. “Philza is my father,”

“Yeah, I know.”

“You know him,”

“I do,” she confirms.

He nods and stares at his black screen emptily. He looks up again. “My phone’s dead, do you have a charger?”

“There’s one in a backroom,” Niki responds. “I’ll charge it for you.”

“Thanks,” There’s a hesitation again, as both of them don’t know what to say. When Niki returns, Tommy musters up.

Niki finds something to say for him, though. “I won’t treat you differently, Tommy. After what I’ve learned, I won’t treat you differently from before. But... I’m here.”

“What?”

“You’ve gone through a lot. If you don’t want to talk about it with anyone else, then you can speak to me.”

“I don’t understand what you’re trying to tell me,” Tommy says slowly.

Niki widens her eyes. “I mean that you’ve gone through a lot of traumatic things, that no one should go through. It’s good to have a therapist, but it’s sometimes good to have a friend too.”

Tommy stands. “I need to go.”

“Wait Tommy,” Niki sighs and reaches her arm out. She hesitates at his shoulder and pulls her arm back. “I’m not telling you to do anything. But I knew before that you talked to Tubbo and Wilbur. They were your friends, right? But you came to me instead.”

Tommy comes to Niki to find Wilbur. Now, he wants to leave.

“Did you come here to talk to me?” Niki asks and Tommy stays silent. Something flashes within her eyes, but it is not hurt. “Did you want to speak to Tubbo? Or Wilbur?”

“No,”

“I know you left them last time without much to stay.”

“I’m finished talking about this, Niki,” Tommy stands and there is a finality in his tone, as he hopes his silent message has reached her. “I wanted you to know that I’m safe, that’s all. I’ll go now.”

“Your phone is in the backroom though,” Niki sighs as she complies. “And I called Wilbur.”

Tommy stops. His words are small, still, and almost silent. “What did you say?”

“I called Wilbur, Tommy,” Niki says. “He’s worried about you, kid.”

“Don’t,” Tommy frowns.

“Sorry,” Niki apologizes and gently raises her hands. “He wants to talk to you. And I think you want to talk to him.”

“What are you doing?” Tommy doesn’t understand why they all act as if they understand him when they don’t. They act as if he is Theseus and they know him as Tommy when they do not know Tommy – nor do they know him as Theseus. It is a mess and Tommy realizes he does not understand himself either.

“Wilbur is your brother,” Niki says plainly and Tommy blinks.

“No, he isn’t.”

Niki’s face changes.

“Thank you for letting me try your food, and I apologize that I stopped working without telling you,” Tommy continues, his voice polite and cold. “Dream and Sapnap are my brothers,” he then corrects her and disappears into the back room to retrieve his phone.

He swears when he takes it off his charger. One, at the missed calls, and two, at his decision to come. He wants to find Philza to explain everything, and now he will have to explain to Dream on why he arrived at Niki’s bakery in the first place.

(A small part of him wants to stay. He wants to stay and wait for Wilbur.)

But he will leave now before Wilbur comes.

Tommy’s plan comes to an end when he hears a familiar voice outside of the room, he stands in.

It is Wilbur’s.

Niki speaks to him. “He’s in the back room right now, Will. Although I’m not sure you should go talk to him.”

“I came all the way here, Niki,” He replies, and Tommy tenses. “He’s my brother, Niki.”

“Wil–”

“I don’t care if he doesn’t accept that – he doesn’t have to. But I need to speak to him.”

“I talked to him, he doesn’t want that, Wilbur.”

Tommy takes a deep breath out, and clutches his phone, stepping out of the backroom. His eyes lock with familiar brown, and the air turns thin.

“Tommy,” Wilbur says plainly, and Tommy wonders why he doesn’t refer to him as *Theseus*, because that’s who he is to Wilbur. Theseus.

“Wilbur,” Tommy forces himself to nod his head and turn away quickly. “I’ll be leaving Niki.” He wants to say, ‘I’ll see you soon’ but he can’t promise that.

(Purpled tells him to value Philza and his family. But Tommy can’t speak to Wilbur. He cannot.)

“Tommy,” Wilbur repeats.

Tommy side steps past him and leaves the store. He takes out his phone around the block and calls Sapnap. “Can you pick me up?”

“Tommy,” Sapnap groans. “*Where the fuck are you? Are you with fucking Purpled?*”

“No, I lied. Pick me up.”

“*I’d appreciate some manners considering I’m saving your ass,*” Sapnap mutters. “*I haven’t told Dream.*”

“Thanks,”

“Thanks,” Sapnap mocks his words. “*Where are you?*”

Tommy sighs and tells him the street name, and resigns, telling him it’s by Niki’s bakery.

Sapnap turns oddly quiet. “Tommy?” he asks. “*Why are you there?*”

“Tommy,” Wilbur stands behind him, and Tommy freezes.

“Tommy,” Sapnap repeats in his ear. “*Who’s that?*”

“Wilbur,” Tommy murmurs back to Sapnap, whose voice erupts.

“*I’ll be there,*” Sapnap’s voice returns. “*I’m staying on the phone with you.*”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “What do you want, Wilbur?”

Wilbur just looks at him. Sapnap keeps talking in his ear, and Tommy drowns his words out by cutting the call. He turns to the man, who’s eyes have dark circles under them, and his hair isn’t combed.

“Hey,” he says softly, as Tommy watches. “Look, Tommy–”

“Why are you calling me that?”

Wilbur blinks and uneasily says, “That’s your name?”

Tommy swallows. He assumes Wilbur would call him Theseus. “Uh, yeah.”

“What do you want me to call you?” Wilbur asks, but he doesn’t take a step forward nor does he look his way. His eyes look past him, at the city view distance.

“Tommy’s fine.”

“How’s Quackity?”

Tommy furrows his eyebrows. “What?”

“How’s Quackity?” Wilbur asks with a smile, his eyes flickering to him.

“He’s alright?”

“That’s good.” Wilbur nods. “And Dream?”

A bitch, Tommy almost says. *As usual*. “He’s fine.”

Wilbur looks over at him as if he’s searching for something. He eventually ends up saying, “I’m sorry” and Tommy could not be more uncomfortable.

“I’ve been waiting for Theseus to come back for a while,” Wilbur tells him. “We didn’t know if you were alive or dead half the time. So, when I found out it was you, I scared you.”

“Wilbur–”

“I know better now,” Wilbur says. “I’ve been waiting for Theseus, but he’s – you’re – Tommy now. And I can’t be the brother I hoped I could be, because you have Dream.”

Tommy gulps. “Wil–”

“I understand that,” he says. “But you were my friend before I knew this. As annoying as you were, we did get along, didn’t we?”

“I guess so.”

“So, I’ll be here, as your friend,” Wilbur says. “You don’t need a brother right now, but you need a friend. You have Tubbo too in case you’ve forgotten. And Niki. Don’t blame her for calling me over, I made her promise to tell me if you ever showed up at the bakery.”

“Yeah,” Tommy’s throat feels dry. “Thanks.”

“You have my phone number, right?”

“I got a new phone.”

“Right,” Wilbur nods and the air is chilly. “That’s good.”

They stand in silence. Tommy is trained to meet the eye of his opponents, but he can’t seem to meet Wilbur’s eyes.

(Maybe he is frightened that he will remember more if he looks into his eyes. But he can’t admit so.)

“I think I’ll go then,” Wilbur sighs after the silence passes.

“What?” Tommy furrows his eyebrows.

“Phil and Techno don’t think as I do. They want you back, they care about you a lot. Even if you’ve changed, and even if you’re not Theseus anymore. I don’t think I can be like that.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You deserve a choice, Tommy,” Wilbur says. “You haven’t gotten many choices for your life, so it’s up to you if you’ll stay with Dream, or not. But I’m always here as a friend.”

It is a weird thought. In this life and many other lives; they are brothers by blood. But Wilbur allows him to remain with the brothers who are tied with him through sweat and tears. Through history and experience.

Tommy doesn’t know why choices are so suffocating. He remembers what Purpled said – how he should appreciate the family he has, as the years he was gone, they were searching.

“Can I ask you something, Wilbur?” Tommy asks him before he leaves. “What’s up with Quackity? What’s the real reason Philza won’t go ahead with the plan?”

“Phil values loyalty, and Quackity broke his. Years ago, and even the thin strand they had now.” Wilbur shrugs. “Philza wants vengeance for The Academy, and he wants to make sure those kids are safe with a life you never had, and Quackity goes against that idea.”

Tommy hesitates. “What did you just say?”

“Didn’t you know?” Wilbur tilts his head. “Huh.”

“What does Quackity want?”

“Who knows what Quackity wants. He’s not okay, he hasn’t been for years.” Wilbur mutters.

“Philza’s still going ahead, with Quackity or without. But Quackity needs him, more than he needs him.”

Tommy’s gears in his head turn. Something does not make sense.

“When you figure it out, you and Dream – and whoever else, can join us,” Wilbur promises. “You don’t have to stay. But I know you want to help.”

“Wilbur–”

“I know, I know,” he nods his head. “Your choice, Tommy. You don’t have to make it now.”

A car approaches and Tommy sees Sapnap’s face. Wilbur takes that as his queue to leave.

“Bye Tommy,”

Tommy breathes out, and white fog stains the air. He turns to Wilbur, to say goodbye, only he is gone, leaving Tommy wondering if he was there in the first place.

Sapnap parks in front of him and rolls down the window. “You owe me.”

Tommy gets in and stares at his cold palms. “Thanks, Sapnap.”

Sapnap rolls his eyes. “It’s whatever, I guess.”

Tommy stares out the window as Sapnap drives back to *Las Nevadas* and he wonders.

Wilbur does not regret telling Tommy.

He calls Punz.

It is rare they go on missions together – Dream, Sapnap, George, and him.

Usually, very usually, they are split up. Theseus goes on missions with Dream because Dream is his mentor and Theseus is the youngest. He is the youngest agent at the Academy to complete missions, so they must put him with someone trustworthy, in case he screws over. (If he were to screw over, Theseus would be dead because they do not allow for mistakes.)

It takes a couple of years until they allow him to go on missions himself.

George and Sapnap go together because Sapnap's wrath meets George's calmness and critical thinking. George goes with Dream as well, however, the pair is reserved for the most difficult missions.

Theseus once asks Dream why he does not go with Sapnap. Dream mentors Theseus, and pairs with George, but he is never paired with Sapnap. Dream doesn't tell him, so he asks Sapnap instead, who rolls his eyes and scoffs, "Dream doesn't pair with me because he doesn't like to."

"That's not true." Dream casually interrupts their conversation which occurs at dinner, moving away from whispering to George. "They just don't pair us up. Believe it or not Sapnap, but I don't decide." They have a stare-down, one that Dream wins as Sapnap turns back to Theseus.

"Dream's probably complained about me, which is why."

But then – they are not split up for once, and they go on a mission together. Theseus has turned fifteen, and the Headmaster calls him to their office, in the middle of his language lessons. He is met by three familiar faces and one cold and thinks he is in trouble.

Instead, they are told of a mission in Libya, where there is a smaller agency that they must remove and take down. It is not large, they are told, but gaining enough control to which they will soon hold power that the Academy cannot afford to compete with.

Theseus watches Sapnap freeze as they are told of the location. He covers it up smoothly, but he knows this will be a slightly difficult one for Sapnap, as his final mission was in Egypt, which he had crossed to Libya – before he had successfully completed the mission.

Dream is told he will lead; the statement is given as he always does. George will be in charge of the explosives. They will detonate the agency to the floor and any survivors will be taken captive. If they are heavily injured, that is Sapnap's job, to make sure that they are all dead.

"Sixteen," they finally say, and Theseus feels the assassins' eyes next to him flicker. "You will leave the explosives in the agency. You will figure a way inside, and it is your job to set them off."

George interrupts, quickly. "Sir, I assumed that was my role."

The Headmaster raises their eyebrows. "I assumed you could hear me correctly. You will take them with you, and make sure the explosives are in working order. Sixteen will set the explosives off."

No one must argue or interrupt. They are not allowed to.

The Graduates leave first, and Theseus is left in the office. Dream gives him a side-eye, and George nods his head as they exit the room. Sapnap seems uneasy.

"Don't fail me, Sixteen," The Headmaster states after a minute of looming silence. Where the room grows colder, and Theseus must meet the Headmaster's dark eyes for too long. "This is your chance to prove your worthiness."

Theseus nods his head. "Yes, Sir."

"The testing will continue," The Headmaster announces, and Theseus is trained to not freeze. "You are far from perfection. However, this mission may prove that one day you are valuable enough to be their fourth."

"Yes Sir."

"You are dismissed," The Headmaster nods, and his eyes turn white. "I'll be watching." Theseus leaves the room. He takes three steps outside and turns the corner when he bumps into Dream, Sapnap, and George who wait for him, leaning against the wall.

Dream notices him first. He pushes off the wall and walks toward him. "What did he say?"

"Nothing important," Theseus ignores his eyes. "Are we going to train?"

"Don't you have class?" Sapnap questions.

"We'll train after," Dream tells him, with a nod. "At six, after your classes."

Theseus nods and the assassins leave. Dream stays though, for a moment longer. "What did he tell you, Theseus. Tell me."

Theseus can't. Dream must not know about the tests. So, he lies as he usually does. "He went through my part of the mission. Nothing important."

"You're not detonating the explosive," Dream then says. "I'll do it. Or George."

"What?" Theseus quickly interrupts. "No Dream, that's my job."

“We’ll discuss it later,” he assures them. “Let’s go, you don’t want to miss out on your class for too long.”

“I’m doing it,” Theseus repeats as they step into the elevator, and Dream flashes his card at the scanner. “The Headmaster gave me the job. I’m going to do it.”

“No, no you’re not.” Dream’s voice sounds final as if he will not negotiate. “It’s dangerous and I don’t know why he thought it was a good idea.”

Theseus cannot argue with Dream any longer because the older places him in a headlock and forces him to comply with his demand before he lets go. He takes him to class, and the mission cannot arrive soon enough.

It does. A week of training straight is enough, as they take The Academy’s jet to the destination. There, George carefully brings in the weapons and some Instructors tell them any extra information. They tell Dream; Theseus overhears their conversation as he assists George carry the weapons.

On the jet, they are quiet as they usually are before missions. Dream’s eyes are closed, as he meditates and finds a correct mindset. George’s eyes stare in front of him blankly, his eyes are void. Sapnap stares out of the window, Theseus notices his leg jittering.

Theseus nudges him. “You alright?”

Sapnap hums, turning. “What?”

“You seem on edge, you usually aren’t,” Theseus whispers, his voice quiet as he does not want to interrupt Dream and George’s concentration. “Is it because we’ll be near your final mission?”

Sapnap presses his lips as if he does not want to admit the vulnerability. “It’s almost as if the Headmaster made us all go to test us. He’s testing if I can handle it.”

Theseus nods his head slowly. He wonders what they are testing Dream and George for. (Because Theseus knows that he is examined to see if he can be their fourth and live up to the title.)

“I’ll be fine though,” Sapnap nods.

“You’ll tell us,” Dream opens his eyes, and Theseus and Sapnap turn to him. “If you’re not fine.”

“Sure,” Sapnap rolls his eyes. “I won’t screw up the mission.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You were thinking it.”

Theseus begins to understand why Sapnap, and Dream do not get partnered in missions. It isn’t that they cannot work together – as they’ve known each other for years and direct some classes with one another. In missions, however, it is another story. They are both leaders and bold. They talk against or on top of one another and conversations end in arguments – George usually plays the peacekeeper.

It is why George balances them out. George can pair with either of them, but they cannot pair with each other.

They arrive at a remote location, a setting where they will reside for the night. They will

commence the mission in the early morning. The jet leaves without them, and George and Theseus move the explosives into the small living room. They are kept in crates and once they move all the weapons, is when George breaks open the boxes and examines them.

Theseus sits by him, as George explains each part to him. They hear Sapnap and Dream argue from the kitchen.

“I’ll detonate the explosives,” Sapnap snaps. “I’ve done it before, I can do it again.”

“You’re less experienced than I am, and you weren’t there when George explained how to,” Dream is calmer but more stubborn.

George rolls his eyes next to Theseus. “They’re idiots. I’m going to do it.”

Theseus bites the inside of his cheek. “George. I think I should.”

George ignores him. “This part is what you shouldn’t touch. If you open this slide, there are eight sets of colored wires. The red ones will set the explosive off immediately. So, we have to cut off the yellow.”

“What about the other colors?”

“I wasn’t told what green does. Blue doesn’t do anything, but I don’t want to take any chances.”

Dream and Sapnap’s conversation travels into the room they’re in as they walk and argue.

“George,” Sapnap glares at Dream. “Tell Dream, I’m doing it.”

“George,” Dream spits back.

Theseus interrupts. “I think—”

“Be quiet Theseus,” They all say, and Theseus presses his lips shut.

George stands. “You both have roles in the mission, it wouldn’t make sense for either of you to do it.”

“George—”

“No,” George interrupts. “Shut up. Sapnap, you have to take down any surviving agents anyway and Dream, you’re on the lookout. So, stop fucking arguing and acting like recruits for fuck’s sake.”

George does not blow up usually. The room stills and Theseus stands, hoping for once he won’t be interrupted.

“I’m going to do it.” He speaks. “The Headmaster wants me to do it, and I’m going to.”

“Theseus, what did I just say—”

“You’re colorblind, George, you don’t know what wires to cut,” Theseus reminds him, scoffing. “Dream, if he does it, he could get killed in the process since the fuck can’t tell red and yellow apart.”

“I’ll figure it out.”

“Theseus is right,” Dream says, and the two Graduates turn to him in disbelief. “George, you can’t do it.”

They argue and resist. But they realize that there is a reason why the Headmaster assigned each their own roles, as they need to follow.

So, Dream goes through everything, very slowly, very carefully with him. Thrice. He forces Theseus to recite his plan, word by word and makes sure he does not stumble or think for too long.

“Dream,” Theseus yawns. “I know what the fuckin’ plan is.”

“I don’t care,” Dream forces him to repeat. “What are you doing after you cut the red wires?”

“Don’t you mean yellow?”

Dream nods. “You’re actually listening then.”

Theseus shoves him. “I know what I’m doing, and I know that I have to get out of there. I’m trained, Dream. You don’t have to underestimate me.”

“I’m not underestimating you; I know you’re perfectly capable,” Dream tells him, and Theseus does not believe him. “But I won’t let you get hurt, kid. The less you have to do on these types of missions, the less you get hurt.”

“Does it even matter?” Theseus leans back in his seat and stares at the ceiling. “I’m hurting others. I guess I deserve it in return.”

Dream grabs his shoulders and shouts in his face. “Theseus,” he glares. “Theseus.”

Theseus knows they do not have a choice – Dream goes through him as soon as his nightmares begin when he begins missions. It is not his fault he is told when others are killed or hurt because of his actions. It is not his fault that he will set off an explosive and hundreds of assassins will die in a few hours.

Dream tells him what he always says. He tells him that it’s not his fault that they are doing this and that they do not have a choice. Dream tells him that it will never be his fault and Theseus wonders if it is concern heard in his voice.

(It’s no concern as Dream doesn’t feel. Dream is the best assassin; he does not let anything get to him.)

“Little brother,” Dream tells him, and Theseus pushes him away, groaning.

“Fuck off.”

“Theseus,” Dream repeats. “The mission will go accordingly. Just remember what you have to do.”

The mission does go accordingly.

Theseus feels so close to death as he pulls open the explosives and finds the wires George speaks about before. His heart beats, in rhythm to the sirens in the background.

George is in his ears, telling him to take out his scissors and cut the yellow wires. Dream is in his other ear to be fast.

Theseus stumbles with the scissors and hears screams. He cuts the wires and sprints.

Some men find him as he turns the corner. They have a similar black uniform as he does, but a different crest on their pockets. They shout in his direction, and Theseus ignores the fear he sees settle within them, as he takes the knives out of his pocket, and throws them in their directions. He aims for their legs so they can't follow.

"Theseus!" Dream shouts in his ear. *"Where the fuck are you?!"*

Theseus pants as he directs himself through the halls, the timer in his head decreasing as every second passes.

He wonders if he will make it out.

His feet hit the floor and he skids into another hallway, empty without agents. He hears the first explosion and knows if he wants to make it out alive, he must find the door now.

He hears Dream and George in both ears as he runs. His body will collapse, he thinks, as his heart explodes and his ears ring with sounds.

When Theseus reaches the door, he almost hesitates.

If he does not escape, he will die along with the agency. He will get what is coming for him, what he deserves.

But he hears Dream's voice inside his ears and inside his soul and rushes out into the sun. He runs and does not allow his legs to stop until he is where Dream tells him to be after the explosions.

In the distance, the explosion drowns out the screams and cries.

George and Dream are by him, not long later. George instructs him to turn, and when he doesn't, he shoves Theseus around so he can assess him for damages. As he does, Dream shouts his name until he can hear. "Theseus!"

"I can't hear you from my left ear,"

George nods. "We can fix that later. Are you hurt?"

"I'm fucking fine." The explosions drowned out the last screams, but Theseus still hears them. He wonders if he will ever not.

(He knows once the testing resumes again, that he'll be fine – that he'll forget.)

"You did good, Theseus," Dream says. "I'm proud."

"Well done," George nods, congratulating him.

"Thanks," he coughs into his fist and stares up at the sun. "Did everything go well on your part?"

"Some people caught us just as you slipped in. Sapnap handled it."

"Speaking about Sapnap," George notices. "Where is he?"

As soon as he asks, Dream stands, pressing his earpiece. "Sapnap?"

Theseus hears Sapnap's voice, although it sounds more like a buzz. He sees Dream nod his head and double press the earpiece again. "He needs some help clearing a couple of bodies. He thinks some of them are still alive."

George nods and glances at him. “Are you good to walk?”

“I’m not a fucking child, Gogs.”

“Geez, sorry for asking.” George stands and Theseus does, after. He has a slight limp, probably from falling after sprinting out. But his heart no longer pounds as harsh and his ears ring only softer now.

Sapnap is located on the other side of the building. He waves them over and they look through the bodies, nudging their faces to notice a reaction. Theseus watches the frowns on their lips and their faces go strict. It is a gruesome sight, but they have a job to complete.

They do the following for an hour. Theseus no longer feels uncomfortable and lets himself relax – or at least, relax more than before.

“I’d say this was a good bonding experience,” Theseus jokes after, and the three’s eyes look over at him slowly.

“What?” Sapnap asks, confused.

“A good bonding experience,” Theseus nods.

“Theseus,” George blinks. “What about this is a *bonding* experience?”

Theseus rolls his eyes and nudges a face with his foot. “Fine, geez, sorry for the humor.” He attempts to lighten the mood.

“You’re a fucking child.” Sapnap grumbles.

“You’re an adult, that’s worse.”

After they finish, Dream wraps an arm around Theseus’ shoulder. “Bonding experience, huh? I thought you hated it when I call you my younger brother.”

Theseus’ face heats. “Shut the fuck up, Dream.”

“Younger brother,” he says in French, and then Spanish, and a few more times in a few other languages. He wheezes at Theseus’ reaction. “I’ll ask if we can go on more missions together if you want.”

“I don’t think I want to do any of that shit again.”

Dream shrugs. “This wasn’t a mission though; it was more of a test.”

“Huh?” Theseus doesn’t know how Dream knows.

“There’s no reason to waste their best agents on a singular mission. They were seeing if you could handle it. They wanted to test George to see if he was able to figure out how to work with the explosives. And I guess my test was to see if I could lead us.”

Theseus reflects on the Headmaster’s unsettling words he cannot forget even if he tried to. “I’ll be watching.” He says and Theseus understands now, what he means. The Headmaster is always watching. They would know if Dream would sacrifice his life for himself and swap their roles in the mission.

Theseus does not tell Dream, however. He dwells on the idea and wonders if his thoughts are true.

He hopes it isn't. If it is, then the Headmaster knows there is a connection – there is care. They do not allow that at The Academy.

So, if they were to find out, it would not be a mission that kills Theseus. It would be The Academy instead.

Chapter End Notes

hey sorry how the updates are slower! i 100% will be finishing this book and there will always be an update (even if that might take a month to do so)

more george next chapter

also some fun stuff coming up maybe the reunion?? maybe more philza?? more quackitys backstory?? purpled and punz??

also random off-topic question asking for a friend maybe, but does the character death tag mean only major characters, or does that include minor characters as well?

thanks for reading! every 20 comments, 1 less character is killed off thanks! (comment theories i'd love to read them all:))

Dismissed

Chapter Summary

“Why does he go to school?” Tommy repeats, his mind still on the thought. “What’s the point?”

“To learn,” Sapnap rolls his eyes as he looks through their fridge, specifically after Dream has told him to not touch anything. (Sapnap’s excuse is that he knows Purpled well enough, the word ‘brother’ resting on his tongue before he stops himself.)

“To learn what? The Academy taught us everything.”

“Not everything,” Dream corrects him. “Purpled will excel in some subjects, but in World History and Science subjects, he won’t be well rehearsed.”

“Oh,” Tommy ends up saying.

“We can put you in school if you want,” Sapnap offers. “Elementary school, so you can be surrounded by people your age.”

Chapter Notes

been a while since i've updated so here's a tiny recap:

Tommy goes to speak to Niki, to apologize for leaving her wordlessly. He meets Wilbur who admits that Quackity isn't who he seems - and his plan of saving the agents of the Academy is false. He also admits that Quackity is lying when he says that that was Philza's intention (to arrest to agents) and Philza actually wants to help them.

Tommy remains conflicted about who is right and wrong.... while in a place somewhere else, George has 'befriended' a former assassin called Eight, and they begin planning their next moves.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled stumbles out of bed, rubbing his eyes while itching his cheek. His eyes open to meet his reflection in the mirror, and he scowls, patting his hair down. He then drops his arms by his side and gives up when his brown hair flies in ten different directions. The same occurrence happens every morning, as he then joins Punz in the kitchen, who sips on his coffee and makes fun of his bed hair.

Alike to any other day, Punz smirks in his direction.

“Shut up,” Purpled groans and pours a cup for himself. He grimaces at the bitterness.

“I didn’t say anything,”

“Shut up,” Purpled repeats.

Punz chuckles. “I bought you a hairbrush, you know.” Purpled calmly places down his cup of coffee and reaches for a knife resting on the cutting board.

Punz stands and reaches for the knife before he can. “No knives, Purpled.”

“I’m going to use it if you don’t shut up.”

Punz mutters something along the lines of, *‘I forget why I speak to you in the mornings’* before he adds, “It’s a kitchen utensil, not a weapon.”

“We both know that isn’t true.”

They end up getting through the morning, even if it involves more death threats and Punz storing the knives in the drawers. They sit at their small table, Punz sipping his coffee as Purpled does the same, while taking a bite of a PB and J, which Punz usually has already made for him, before he wakes up.

“Is this strawberry jelly?” Purpled asks with his mouthful, commenting on the taste.

“No, raspberry.”

Purpled nods. “It’s good.”

Punz presses his mug down and watches him eat for a moment before sighing. “I have to go on a trip with Quackity.”

Purpled doesn’t look up. “Okay? You don’t have to tell me. This happens like every day.”

“I’ll be gone for two weeks,” Punz says and Purpled goes silent, finally looking up into his brother’s eyes. “You can call me whenever you need.”

“Two weeks?”

“Yeah,” Punz says slowly. “Is that fine?”

“Uh, yeah,” Purpled carefully places his sandwich down. “You told me you weren’t tied down to your job, though. You don’t have to go if you don’t want to.”

Punz nods. “I don’t, but Quackity needs me.”

Purpled nods his head and bites his tongue. “Okay, yeah, whatever.”

“That’s okay with you, right? You’re okay with being alone?”

Purpled straightens his back and stares straight. “I was alone for most of my life, Punz. I’m used to it.”

“C’mon kid, you know that—”

“You said you didn’t want to help him, and you know what he’s capable of. This two-week trip isn’t nothing, Punz. If you’re going with him, you’re ultimately helping him with his plan.”

“So, you don’t want me to go?” Punz tilts his head.

Purpled groans. “That isn’t what I meant. I just don’t understand why you’re forgetting what he’s planning to do.”

“I haven’t forgotten,” Punz promises. “I haven’t forgotten anything he’s done.”

“Then what?” Purpled asks. “Why are you helping him? You don’t need to Punz. You don’t need to do anything for him when you know what’s going to do, and capable of doing.”

“Punz?” Purpled repeats when Punz does not speak a word.

Purpled ends up standing when Punz remains silent, grabbing his plate as he does. Punz stops him. “Purpled.”

“When are you leaving?” Purpled asks plainly.

“*Purpled.*”

“No, fuck off.” Purpled drops his plate in his sink and his fingers twitch. “I don’t fuckin’ understand you, Punz.”

“It’s just two weeks.”

“You want to take down the Academy, don’t you?” Purpled glares. “Tell me if you don’t.”

Punz takes a deep breath in. “You know I do, Purpled.”

“Then why the fuck are you helping him? You’re on Philza’s side – you betrayed Quackity to help him, yet you’re still going back.”

“I work for him. He puts food on our table.”

“You have enough money,” Purpled snaps.

“Quackity is getting you into college, he’s paying for your tuition, Purpled,” Punz says. “I’ve told Philza what he’s done, and I don’t trust Quackity’s actions. But you need to trust me, that I know what I’m doing.”

“Fine,” Purpled looks away. “Fine.”

(Purpled never needs loyalty. He never needs reliance. Although Sapnap is somewhat of an exception; Purpled cannot trust anyone.

So, he does not understand why Punz, who has gone against Quackity, *betrayed* him, and spoken to his rival, still goes back. He still provides and helps and trusts his ‘self’ but not his ‘actions.’

Purpled does not understand.)

Purpled goes to his room. He grabs his knife from his drawer and allows the metal to flip around his fingers, as he plays with the weapon. It can kill him, but it calms him. Punz comes around, knocking on his door. At no response from Purpled, he leaves.

Purpled falls asleep again. When he wakes up again, Punz is gone.

Purpled is alone. He can’t say he isn’t used to it. But for once, he wishes he wasn’t.

“Trust,” Dream whispers as their world burns – waiting for Tommy to repeat.

“Trust.”

Quackity tells them, that he is leaving.

“Philza has put me in this position, so I have to figure a way out,” he tells them. “Punz will be coming with me. I’m leaving Antfrost in charge until I return.”

Antfrost nods and the rest of the room is speechless.

“Quackity,” Sapnap responds, slowly. “You didn’t tell me about this.”

Quackity sighs loudly. “Do I need to tell you everything?”

Sapnap shuts up and Quackity continues. “I’ll return in two weeks. Two weeks is when the mission will go forward, and I won’t wait for anyone. I want the agents trained by then, Dream, and I need you to make sure they’re up to standard. Antfrost, the weapons will arrive in a week or so. I need you to make sure everything is there, and the agents are accustomed to them.”

He turns to Slime and Karl. “Slime, you’ll be assisting Antfrost. As the agents are still completing training, you’ll be assigned a few missions in the meanwhile. Karl, I need to speak to you once everyone has left.”

Everyone stares. Tommy holds his breath.

“That is all,” Quackity states. “You are all dismissed.”

(He hasn’t been the same since Philza departed from the alliance. Since everything has fallen apart.)

Sapnap, Dream, Tommy, Karl, and Antfrost remain though.

“Quackity–” Sapnap begins to say, but Quackity raises a hand. Tommy notices how his eyes remain on the papers in his hand, as he cannot afford to look at him.

“I said you were dismissed, Sapnap.”

“You can’t run from your problems, Quackity,” Sapnap growls. “I get Philza’s left but you can’t

leave.”

“It’s funny you say that,” Quackity laughs. “Since that’s all you seem to do.”

Sapnap storms out, after that. Tommy only watches as Dream takes a step forward then, his eyes daring Quackity to say anything against what he wants to hear. “I hope you have something planned Quackity. We all know that two weeks’ worth of training isn’t enough.”

“Good thing I’m prepared,” Quackity grins bitterly. “As Punz is gone, you’ll need to teach a few other classes. Tommy can join you.” Quackity’s eyes meet Tommy’s, who stands at the back of the room, watching the events play out in front of him.

(He is quiet, and he thinks. His mind remains on Wilbur’s words from a few days ago, and he finds himself unfocused and sidetracked.)

“Fine,” Dream mutters. “I’ll see you then, Quackity.” He turns to Tommy, with a sharpness in his eyes and words. “Let’s go, Tommy.”

“Dream—”

“Let’s go.”

“Tommy,” Quackity stops him before he exits his office. He pauses, and says in Spanish, “Take care,” before he turns to Antfrost and Karl.

Sapnap stands in the hallway, his hands on fire and spite in his eyes.

“He didn’t tell me,” he says and repeats. “He didn’t tell me.”

“He doesn’t know how to handle the situation,” Dream crosses his arms over his chest. “He’ll come to his senses soon enough.”

“Two weeks,” Sapnap grumbles. “Two fuckin’ weeks, and he didn’t tell me a thing.”

“To be fair,” Tommy murmurs. “You left him for months.” He references when Sapnap meets Quackity but must leave as The Academy won’t let him stay.

Sapnap snaps his eyes to him, and Tommy turns away. The glare in his eyes is bold, as he has the upper hand that Tommy doesn’t. (Blackmail – as Sapnap has used the whole Tommy-sneaking-out-situation to his advantage every day since.)

Dream surveys the interaction carefully. He raises an eyebrow.

“Is there something you guys aren’t telling me?”

Tommy clamps his lips shut and glares at Sapnap until he does the same.

“It’s nothing,” Sapnap shrugs his shoulders but a look in his eyes says, ‘don’t test me, Tommy’. “Let’s just leave. Karl’s going to leave the office soon, and he probably knows what’s going on with Q – more than I do, anyway.”

Dream and Tommy glance at each other for a second, before following Sapnap who leaves the hallway, hurried. “Are you going to ignore Karl?” Dream asks him.

“No, I’m going to ask him what’s happening, without a choice to respond,” Sapnap tells them as they step into the elevator. “But I’m fucking pissed since Quackity doesn’t tell me anything.”

“You know what is strange?” Tommy then mentions. “We haven’t seen Punz for ages. And now he’s supposedly, leaving with Quackity.”

“It is strange,” Dream acknowledges. “Although, it is somewhat expected.”

“What?” Sapnap and Tommy ask.

“Quackity tells Punz a lot of things. I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s keeping him away purposely – so there isn’t a chance he tells us a thing.”

Dream is right, Tommy thinks.

“He won’t tell Karl the full truth – Punz is the only one who knows.”

The elevator stops on the fifth floor, and the three brothers must shuffle to the side as a woman steps in. She watches them wearily, and they must resume their conversation once the elevator reaches the ground floor.

“There isn’t anything we can do, other than wait. And train.”

“Quackity can do something, he could do more–”

“He’s gone for two weeks, and we can’t stop him,” Dream frowns at Sapnap. “Accept that Sapnap.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“I don’t trust him – you do.” Dream shrugs. “I don’t expect much, from those I don’t trust.”

Tommy scoffs. “You expect so fucking much, Dream.”

Dream turns to Tommy, with a small grin. “Really, huh?”

“Yeah,” Tommy turns away, and before they can bicker further, Sapnap speaks.

“So, we’ll just listen to him?”

“Well done, Sapnap, finally catching on,” Dream rolls his eyes. “We’ll begin training again. I’m not just speaking about going to the gym again, but we’ll get back into shape again with routine. I’ll admit that I’m weaker than before, and I can’t allow that.”

“Sure,” Sapnap shrugs, as they enter their apartment building. “I’m fine with that.”

“That means a better sleep schedule,” Dream says. “I want to work on weapon sparring and combat. Tommy, I want you to do training with Sapnap every night from now on. The Academy is training their agents better, since we aren’t there anymore so this won’t be as easy as before. Besides, I guess we have titles to uphold as well, I guess.”

Their fourth, the words whisper in Tommy’s mind again. *Their fourth*.

“You got that, Tommy?” Dream turns to him. “Kid?”

“Yeah,”

“Not completely the same as before,” Dream needs to remind him. “You don’t have to wake up at six. I don’t expect that.”

“I know, Dream.” (A part of him isn’t so sure, though.)

“Just making sure.”

Two weeks may not seem like much, though it is. Dream lives up to his words because Tommy wakes up the next morning to a glass of protein shake on the counter. Sapnap sits on a kitchen stool, his glass half empty.

“Morning,” Sapnap doesn’t look up from his phone. “Did you sleep well?”

The question is less rare nowadays, after the whole sleeping pill thing. Tommy is less tired than before, and the dreams haven’t begun again so he sleeps well and can stay awake for normal periods of the day.

Although the drink on the counter makes him want to fall asleep again. It’s a horrible color green, the same color as Tommy’s puke when he will throw up after drinking it. “I guess,” he responds to Sapnap’s former question. “Where’s Dream?”

“Started on lessons,” Sapnap says, finally looking up at him. Tommy notices there is something different about him – but he can’t put his finger on it. “He told me to tell you after you finished breakfast, to join him.”

Tommy frowns. “Teach?”

“Yeah,” Sapnap blinks. “Is there a problem with that?”

Tommy shakes his head. “Uh, no – no there isn’t.”

“Are you sure?” Sapnap raises an eyebrow as Tommy picks up the glass of green drink. His eyes follow him, to make sure he drinks it.

“Yeah,”

“The shake doesn’t taste too bad. We have to lay off the snacks though, that’s the more difficult bit.”

(Nutrition is important to remain the best agents at The Academy. They give their agents enough food – but that’s it – just enough.

Theseus lives on vanilla pudding. Dream forces him to finish the bread and vegetables too. Because if he wants to survive, he must remain strong and eat healthily.

Theseus does not understand why Dream is so amendment about his eating until they escape.)

Tommy ends up downing it all in one go. He finishes, coughing and spluttering and Sapnap stands to grab him a glass of water.

“You’re an idiot,” he tells him. “You didn’t have to drink it all at once.”

It doesn’t taste as bad, Tommy knows. He knows with experience.

He ends up heading out of the apartment, after changing into his gear and joining Dream in the hall assigned for lessons. The gym and training rooms are packed, and it’s only seven. Tommy assumes that everyone is aware of the mission that will be happening soon – Antfrost and Karl would have alerted them, as Quackity has already left.

Tommy finds Dream training in the hall with thirty other agents. Tommy counts them all and observes their faces – their ages ranging around from twenty to twenty-five at first glance. He stands at the back of the room and watches as Dream shows them a demonstration, as they stand around him. They do not stand with their chins high and their backs straight, in straight rows alike at The Academy. Dream isn't scowling or blank-faced. Rather he smiles as he shows off technique and teaches them a flip.

Tommy recognizes the motion. Dream flips the student and shows the students where to point their weapon, after their back slams backward, to shove them to the ground. He then helps the student up and pats their shoulder.

"Tommy's here," Dream then announces to his students, and Tommy freezes against the back wall as others turn to glance at him. "Come over,"

Tommy almost doesn't. He rolls his shoulders and pushes against the wall with his eyes blank and back straightened. "I showed you guys that particular movie, but Tommy over here will show you how to escape it."

A student raises their hand, as Tommy walks up to Dream, whose eyes scan him for a moment, before turning to the student. "Why'd you teach us, if it's easily defendable against?"

Tommy knows that a question like that at The Academy wouldn't end well.

He also knows that they're not there anymore, though. Instead, Dream nods his head. "*Everything* you do is defendable and can be used against you. So, I'll be teaching you everything I can, so there are fewer worse situations you'll be left in."

"Tommy?" Dream glances at him, and Tommy straightens, his mind turning.

"Yes, s—" He cuts himself off. (He's not there anymore.)

Dream notices, though. He notices his stoic face and tough voice. So, he ruffles his hair, and shoves him lightly, forcing Tommy to relax. (He doesn't know why he's so uptight today. It's likely due to the memories of teaching and lessons coming back to him.)

"Tommy didn't train in The Academy as long as I, so I'll beat him easily. I don't expect you all to do it exactly as he does now, but hopefully, we'll get to that point after two weeks."

Without warning, Dream swings, and Tommy ducks. Students step back and Tommy is glad he has good special awareness, otherwise he'd be sporting a bloody nose in front of the staring eyes.

Tommy does not hesitate when swinging back and twisting over to grab the knife off the floor. He grabs it between his fingers and kicks Dream's back to force him onto the ground.

Dream doesn't stumble. He stands balanced, turning and grabbing his arm to twist it around. The knife drops as Dream performs the action, he was teaching the class before – twisting him over, and throwing him to the ground, as he grabs his own knife from his belt. Tommy knows he will turn to shove his back on the ground, but Tommy is fast and expects this. He ducks and aims for the back of Dream's knee, which he does not expect.

Dream recovers quickly. As Tommy grabs to retrieve the knife again, Dream grabs his right arm to pull him over. Tommy punches his side as he does, for them to roll on the ground. Tommy jumps on Dream's side, to pin his arms back, but Dream punches and aims for his jaw.

Tommy swears as he tastes blood. He grins (and feels alive.)

Dream swings and Tommy counters, his leg flying upwards, pushing him to the side. They are in deadlock for a moment, both of them delivering punches and kicks, with the occasional jab to the side.

Dream is the best agent of The Academy for a reason. He grabs Tommy's shoulders and pulls his head forward to hit his shoulder. Tommy swears and shoves him to the side. His jaw feels sore, but he ignores the momentary pain as he swipes his knife once again, only for Dream to knock it out from his loosened grip, with his elbow.

The students watch as Tommy pants for air, and Dream has both knives now, pointing them both at Tommy's chin.

(Tommy has never won to Dream. Dream has never lost.)

The students watch Tommy, who wipes his sweat and looks away.

"Well done," Dream's lips tilt upwards. "Good fight."

The students ask them questions. It is then that Tommy finds out some are eighteen and nineteen. The oldest of them is twenty. They seem older, but Tommy knows that the fighting and blood add a couple of years to them.

(He knows that looks his age, even with the years on his back. Sapnap tells him it's because he has a young face.

Tommy sometimes wonders if it's because of the experiments.)

"Is it better to use a gun or knife in a situation like that?"

"A gun will kill them," Dream tells them. "That's not what we're intending to do."

"Are you going to teach us how you did the rest?"

"A lot of the defense Tommy and I did wasn't taught – it's pure intuition of how to move and act to survive." At their confused expressions, he adds. "But I guess I can show you."

Once the questions are over, and they begin sparring on the mats, Dream joins Tommy by the weights. He squirts water into his mouth and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

Dream frowns. "That's my bottle."

"I didn't bring mine."

"You should have thought of that, before you came," Dream takes his bottle back and takes two long sips. "Well done. You didn't stretch before, did you?"

"Not really." Dream forces him to settle on one of the mats, to 'let his muscles breathe'.

"Is your jaw alright?"

Tommy feels it. "I think so?"

"I think I punched you too hard, we'll get it checked later."

"I'm fine, Dream," Tommy rolls his eyes. "I've been hurt, worse."

Dream rolls his eyes. “I know you have.” Tommy chuckles, pulling his arms behind his back and rolling his joints. Dream stands to assist the other students with their techniques.

He ignores the stinging pain in his face, and his mind wanders around the room until he remembers Wilbur’s words again. He keeps thinking about them – how Quackity was disloyal and does not intend to do what he tells them.

Quackity won’t help the students of The Academy, Wilbur tells him, and Tommy hopes that he lies. Wilbur has no reason to, but Quackity has no reason to not save the children either.

Half of Tommy’s mind disagrees with him – because Wilbur wants him back and wants him to be his brother. He can lie and make this up – so Tommy believes him and leaves Quackity’s agency.

But Tommy also knows that Quackity values power. He desires to build his status and grow an agency with trained agents.

(Tommy remembers Dream telling him, how he refuses to kill anymore, which annoyed Quackity who wanted that expertise. He had asked him as well – to join. Tommy had denied it, though.)

So, Tommy is confused.

He cannot tell Dream and Sapnap, though. If he tells them – and Wilbur turns out to be wrong, then they will be further away from taking down The Academy than they are now. Tommy knows that they don’t have the time – not when The Academy grows more powerful every day and the money over Tommy’s head dwindles longer.

He almost forgets – of the reward above his head. *One hundred thousand dollars*. But he remembers, once Sapnap reminds him in the car, after meeting with Wilbur. His recklessness and irresponsibility would have screwed him over – were the older’s words. Sapnap had also mentioned he wasn’t going to cover for him after that instance – and that he was on his own if he was going to pull a similar stunt again.

After the conversation, Tommy did punch Sapnap’s shoulder, and they may have almost crashed Dream’s car. (Although Tommy will deny it if Sapnap brings it up.)

Dream comes up to him after he stretches. “You finished?” He asks, to which Tommy nods his head. For the next two hours, they assist students and Tommy makes him spar a couple for practice. Although, he’s forced to go easy on them.

Once the lesson is over, Dream offers to go back to the apartment so that they can eat lunch.

“You finished the protein shake, didn’t you?” Dream asks as they walk down the white hallways of the agency, wiping sweat off their foreheads and allowing the cold air to press against their hot skin.

“Yeah,” Tommy takes his phone out of his pocket, noticing how Sapnap has texted him. “Sapnap was very adamant about me drinking it.”

Dream smirks and Tommy reads the message Sapnap has sent him. “He just texted me – he’s not at the apartment right now. He’s in a meeting with Antfrost, apparently.”

Dream raises an eyebrow. “What for?”

Tommy shrugs. “How would I know?” Dream rolls his eyes and shoves him.

“We’ll go to the cafeteria, then. I can’t be bothered cooking,”

They exit the training halls and head to the main agency building. They know Dream’s face, so they don’t have to flash their card as they enter the building. There are quite a few agents around, but Dream notices a vacant table at the back. Tommy recognizes some faces from Dream’s classes.

They grab their trays and line up in the queue. Tommy doesn’t know what he’s expecting, but he remembers the limited options he receives at The Academy. The same tub of yogurt, slices of bread, fruit, salad, and his favorite – vanilla pudding. The menu had only changed twice when he was there when the Instructors decided to add more vegetables to their diets.

But here, there are rows of different options that Tommy does not expect. He should have, considering Quackity runs this place and is anything but cheap. Rows of different pasta and noodles dance in his vision, accompanied by snacks and chocolate. Juices and a fridge of soft drinks are also here, as well as a smaller dessert bar.

“Tommy,” Dream laughs lightly, and Tommy can practically hear him roll his eyes. “Come here first, dessert later.”

Begrudgingly, Tommy resigns and ends up with a salad and chicken sandwich. They sit on the empty table, Tommy sitting by the seat with the view outside. Tommy is almost reminded of mealtimes at The Academy – of the order and structure. The tired expressions of students and weary glances at Dream, who would come over and sit next to him. But everything is so different here, and he can’t compare the two places.

“This is good,” Dream remarks, taking a bite of his meal. Tommy stares down at his food, and his stomach stirs. “You, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” he picks up his fork. He doesn’t feel hungry for some reason – even if the food looks appetizing. Tommy feels nauseous. “It was probably the shake. I drank it too quickly.”

Dream furrows his eyebrows. “I’ll be back.” He stands and leaves, leaving Tommy on the lonely table with the two trays.

Tommy groans and swears – knowing Dream will only be concerned. He’s overthinking Wilbur’s words, and he knows that it’s the stress causing his lack of appetite, not anything else.

Dream returns not long later and throws an object in his direction. Tommy catches it before it hits his eye. He stares at it, and Dream sits down. “Chocolate pudding,” Dream scoffs, amused. “I couldn’t find vanilla.”

“I’ve never tried chocolate before.”

“Go ahead,” Dream nods his head, and Tommy rips the plastic open. It tastes good, and Tommy swallows the next couple of bites down quickly.

“Feeling better?” Dream smiles after he’s finished.

“Shut up.”

Dream chuckles. “What did I do?”

“Stop smiling.”

“I’m not smiling,” Dream frowns.

“You’re ugly.” Tommy is thankful. But truthfully, he doesn’t want Dream to know how much bringing the dessert means to him.

(George and he used to trade their pudding and sour buns. The memory lingers but does not vanish.)

They resume their conversation once Tommy feels better enough to start eating. “We can go on a run later today, or we can go to the gym. Did you want to practice your combat?”

“My combat doesn’t need improving, bitch.” Tommy’s joking around though – the cockiness an act.

“Maybe you’ll be better than Sapnap one day.”

“Do you think I’ll ever beat him in a spar?” Tommy asks but Dream shrugs. “I bet I could take you on, in ‘bout three years.”

“I guess we’ll have to see,” Dream laughs. Tommy wonders if there will be a day that he will win to Dream, and Dream will lose.

“Do you think so?”

Dream pauses. “On the topic of Sapnap – he did tell me that you almost crashed my car.”

Tommy stills. That *fucker*.

“It’s funny,” Dream smirks, observing Tommy’s body language and facial expressions carefully, a calm demeanor settling on his features. “He brought it up randomly, and then quickly denied it. I wasn’t overhearing things, was I? Because I’ve never given you permission to drive my car.”

“I haven’t driven your car before,” Tommy says honestly. It was Sapnap driving, not him.

“So, he was driving then,” Dream says. “I don’t recall this trip.”

Tommy forces his face to turn blank. “It was a while ago, back when we were at our old apartment.”

“Really?” Dream raises both eyebrows. “He told me it happened last week.”

Tommy almost stutters. “I mean, you knew about it – you told him to...?” Although Tommy does not understand what he is trying to convey.

Dream smirks again. “I lied. Sapnap didn’t tell me shit.”

“Oh,”

“He didn’t tell me anything,” Dream leans forward. “You know what you did, Tommy.”

Tommy gulps. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It was the one afternoon, you told me you were training the whole day. I showed up at the training halls, and you weren’t there. On top of that, Sapnap started freaking out, and next thing I know – my car is missing.”

Tommy does not like how Dream can read him easily, and he’s unable to lie. He also doesn’t like how he will be admitting what he had hoped to keep to himself.

“No more secrets,” Dream reminds him. “Remember that? Talk to me Tommy, what happened?”

“Nothing bad.”

Dream raises an eyebrow, asking him silently if he’s telling the truth.

“Nothing *too* bad,” he ends up correcting himself.

“Well?”

“I gave Niki a visit,” Tommy ends up admitting, staring at his metal tray. “To apologize.”

“What were you apologizing for?” Dream demands.

“I left her, Dream,” Tommy says seriously. “Without a word.”

“You didn’t need to apologize and risk your safety for that,” Dream glares. “You haven’t forgotten that there are people out for you, and you put yourself in danger. On top of that, we know Niki has a connection to Philza.”

“Philza isn’t dangerous.”

Dream raises an eyebrow. “Really?” Tommy says nothing. “You put yourself in danger, Tommy. And did something I told you specifically not to do.”

“I can defend myself,” Tommy mutters. “Besides, you have bodyguards looking out for me – I would have been fine.”

Dream glares away. “Not anymore.”

“What?”

“I fired them,” Dream says and Tommy splutters.

“Why?”

“They weren’t good enough. But that’s beside the point. I’m disappointed, Tommy.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “I couldn’t give a shit.” Dream scoffs but it’s lighthearted. Dream may be angry at the moment, but Tommy is safe now. He didn’t get hurt so there isn’t any point in lashing out further. “What did you talk to Niki about?”

Tommy blinks. “Wilbur was there too.”

Dream suddenly goes oddly silent. Tommy pokes his food as he waits for a response. “Well? What did he say?”

Tommy takes a deep breath. “He told me that Philza never wants to hurt the children at The Academy, that was never his intent like Big Q had said his was. It’s *Big Q*, who wants to.”

Dream freezes. “And you trust Wilbur?”

“Well,” Tommy pauses. “I don’t know if I trust *Quackity*.”

Dream takes a bite of a slice of bread as he stares in thought. “I guess it was always a possibility, that Quackity was deceiving us with his true intentions. Although, I did believe his loyalty for

Sapnap was larger than any other motive.”

“Sapnap trusted him – *we* trusted him.” Tommy sighs, and murmurs under his breath so they can both hear. “Connection is death.”

Dream leans forward to ruffle his hair and Tommy bats his arm away. “Fuck off.”

“What else did Wilbur say?”

Tommy thinks for a second. “He mentioned that years ago, Quackity had broken Philza’s trust. He didn’t reiterate further, though. He also mentioned that since then, he hadn’t been the same.”

“Interesting,” Dream comments. “Interesting.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Tommy sighs. “What to think. Because Big Q’s meant to be more trustworthy, but what Wilbur says makes sense.”

“*You* don’t have to know what to do,” Dream says after they’ve finished their food. (Dream waits for Tommy to finish his tray.) “I’ll figure it out.”

“Fuck no, you’re not taking credit for this shit,” Tommy shoves his shoulder and Dream retaliates by pushing him. They dump their trays by the stack of plates and leave the building. “I think I have an idea,”

“Well? What is it?”

“Punz is gone, but I think Purpled is still here,” Tommy thinks out loud. “So, we’ll pay him a visit.”

Purpled and Punz hadn’t come to them, so Tommy supposes they’ll have to go to them instead.

They find Punz’s house.

It is not too far from *Las Nevadas*. The neighborhood is not terrible and there are shops nearby. Dream takes a drive around, to observe the area before they park close to the location.

Sapnap sits in the front seat, leaning forward. Tommy rolls his eyes and scoffs because this is *his* idea, yet he is stuck in the backseat of the vehicle. It is Sapnap’s fault that they are here, and Dream is somewhat mad at them anyway, although Tommy isn’t sure ‘anger’ is the right word to describe the older’s emotions at the moment.

He is disappointed, though. He had shouted at Sapnap earlier, as he was partly to blame for Tommy leaving the agency grounds.

“We could have done this beforehand,” Sapnap announces. “Finding his house wasn’t difficult.”

It wasn't difficult at all. Dream and Sapnap have access to agent databases, which included Punz whose address is outlined in the profiling.

"Punz was the obstacle," Dream reminds him. "But Punz is gone, so our task is a little easier."

"If Purpled doesn't want to crack, he won't admit anything. The Academy raised him,"

"The Academy raised *us*," Dream rolls his eyes. He meets Tommy's eyes through the mirror. "I'll do the speaking, alright kid?"

"I don't know why you specifically looked at me, when you said that," Tommy tells him. "Sapnap's in the car too."

"I can't stop him from talking."

"Well, you can't stop me, bitch."

"Let's just go," Sapnap opens the door and the three brothers exit. Dream walks forward, while Sapnap and Tommy stroll behind him. Sapnap whispers in his ear, "Sleep with one eye open tonight, Tommy."

"What the fuck did I do?"

"You told Dream what happened, and now he's pissed off at me, for letting you leave Nevadas," Sapnap grumbles. "We both know that wasn't my fault," Tommy admits, it wasn't.

"Sapnap," Dream turns. "Stop threatening him."

"I wasn't doing anything," Sapnap responds with fake innocence. Dream appears to have no time to deal with his bullshit because he strides towards the front door of the house and knocks twice. There is no response for a while, and they wonder if there is anyone at home.

"Maybe he's at school?" Sapnap asks, cluelessly. "It's a school day."

Tommy blinks. "Why is he going to school?"

"Why do you think he's going to school, Thomas?"

Tommy punches Sapnap's shoulder. Dream sighs deeply, glancing around. "He might just not be opening the door." He hesitates. "We'll just break in."

Sapnap is about to interrupt. So is Tommy. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"We aren't waiting outside for him to answer the door, Sapnap," Dream says. And they break in.

'They' is Dream, who gets the floor door open with two pins. They glance around the room suspiciously, hearing no noise, and Sapnap's idea that Purpled is at school is confirmed, when they notice the calendar stuck on the fridge.

"Why does he go to school?" Tommy repeats, his mind still on the thought. "What's the point?"

"To learn," Sapnap rolls his eyes as he looks through their fridge, specifically after Dream has told him to not touch anything. (Sapnap's excuse is that he knows Purpled well enough, the word 'brother' resting on his tongue before he stops himself.)

"To learn what? The Academy taught us everything."

“Not everything,” Dream corrects him. “Purpled will excel in some subjects, but in World History and Science subjects, he won’t be well rehearsed.”

“Oh,” Tommy ends up saying.

“We can put you in school if you want,” Sapnap offers. “Elementary school, so you can be surrounded by people your age.”

Tommy tackles Sapnap after that. Sapnap’s back collides with the fridge, and they get into a brawl, Tommy shoving his head down while Sapnap fights back. Dream pulls Tommy off Sapnap in an instant. “What are your problems today. Lay off, and stop touching shit, Sapnap. You both are going to break something.” Tommy sticks his tongue out at Sapnap, and Dream quickly intervenes. “Sapnap wasn’t wrong, it seems.”

“Fuck you.”

They hear the front door rattle then, and Sapnap scrambles off the floor. Footsteps approach before they stop.

Tommy hears a sound – similar to an object being shoved onto the ground before he sees metal – a knife flying in their direction. It misses and targets the wall behind him.

Purpled comes in after that, knives in his hands and his legs ready to jump. Tommy sees his past in his eyes his inner assassin in his soul. He stops abruptly at the presence of the three.

“What the fuck?” Purpled deadpans and raises the knives higher. “You have five fucking seconds to explain why you’re in my house.”

Dream is about to interrupt – but Sapnap does instead. He steps forward and smirks, “Or what, kid?”

“Sapnap,” Purpled grits out, his teeth grinding. “What the fuck are you doing in my house?”

“We needed to talk to you,” Sapnap responds calmly. “Drop the weapon.”

“You’re in my house.”

“We’ve established this.” Purpled raises his knife higher and the two find themselves in a staring match, neither willing to glance away.

The knives in Purpled’s hands slowly slip lower, and he resigns, glancing back at Dream and Tommy. His shoulders unhunch and his eyes become cold, leaving the state they were in before – ready to attack and calculated.

“We needed to talk to you, Purpled,” Sapnap says. “It was Dream’s idea to break in.”

Purpled’s eyes snap to the older. Tommy could laugh at Dream’s expression, as he glowers incredulously in Sapnap’s direction. “Purpled,” Dream ends up saying. There is a hint of authoritativeness in his tone, a strictness. If Tommy wasn’t paying such close attention, he wouldn’t notice Purpled almost flinch.

It is years since they were at The Academy, but the agents will remember it like the previous day. Of the routine and classes. Of the repetitive training and punishment.

In Purpled’s case, he will remember Dream’s eyes and cold expressions. He will remember his

name to be Graduate One and he will remember his burning hands and his lessons to be grueling.

“Fine,” Purpled relents and takes a deep breath out. “Let’s talk.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry to leave it off there, i really wanted to get this chapter out without delaying it out further

thanks for reading i hope you guys are holding up well <3

there is still a decent amount of this work to go. i'll hint that we'll be going into some earlier themes of the story again, and you'll be seeing many previous characters very very soon.

follow me on twitter :o sneak peak for next chapter: GEORGE (on an entirely unrelated note, has anyone seen the new tags haha)

also ps in case you didn't know, this book IS NOT an au for the red room/black widow. (and NOT based on the irl ccs of the smp, more of their characters ig). i did take a lot of inspo for the assassin theme of this story by 'there's blood on your web theseus' but this fic is def not a black widow au.

appreciate you all

Proposal

Chapter Summary

There is not a passing day that Sapnap does not think of George.

His heart aches and he wishes George could have lived.

George is only twenty-one when he passes. Sapnap realizes that he will never feel freedom. He will never live a life away from murder, blood, and conditioning. He will never experience what it is to feel love. He will never live in a small apartment with his brothers for as long as he wants, waking up to light sunsets and the sound of cooking. There are a lot of things George won't be able to do – and Sapnap's heart hurts when he thinks about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy watches Purpled carefully.

Purpled stares back. Tommy notes that he smells like smoke. Sapnap notices too.

“Do you smoke?” Sapnap furrows his eyebrows. “I didn't know you smoked.”

Purpled almost rolls his eyes. “There's a lot you don't know Sapnap,” he pauses. “And a lot I don't know too, apparently.”

They are seated around the dining room. Well, Sapnap, Dream, and Tommy are. Purpled sits on the countertop, keeping his distance. His phone stays in his right hand, and he analyzes the faces of each former assassin carefully.

“Well?” Purpled then asks. “There's a reason why you broke into my house,”

“We need your help,” Dream gets straight to the point.

Purpled snorts. “You need *my* help?”

“We do, and you're the only one with the information that we need,” Sapnap admits. “Punz too, but I doubt he's willing.” At the mention of his brother, Purpled's eyes darken slightly.

“Fine,” Purpled sighs. “What do you need?”

Sapnap seems taken back – as if he doesn't expect Purpled to relent so soon. But Tommy knows that Purpled hasn't agreed to help yet, he just wants to know what their questions are. “It's regarding Quackity. Has Punz told you about him, at all?”

Purpled blinks. “Aren't you his boyfriend? Shouldn't you know this?”

Sapnap splutters, “How do you know that?”

“You told me,” Purpled deadpans. “Keep up, Sapnap.”

“I don’t know, that’s why we’ve come to you. Has Punz told you anything about him? Anything at all?”

“Quackity’s at a meeting with him,” Purpled sighs loudly. “For weeks.”

“We know that,” Dream confirms. “I mean regarding Philza, has Punz told you anything?”

Purpled’s eyes snap to Tommy then, and Tommy sees his mind shift. “Depends.”

“Depends on what?” Sapnap snaps.

“On who’s asking.”

“I’m asking,” Tommy says and edges an eyebrow upwards. “I’m asking.”

“Well then,” Purpled thinks. “Philza is commencing with the plan without Quackity. He’s doing it in two weeks.”

“How does Punz know?”

“Wilbur told Punz. Punz told me.” Purpled admits.

“Punz is working with Wilbur then,” Sapnap confirms, and the three brothers exchange glances. “I didn’t think you were going to be so willing to admit it.”

“I’m not stupid, Sapnap,” Purpled rolls his eyes. “You think I am. It’s obvious that you know that Punz is the traitor and has been telling Phil of all of Quackity’s secrets.”

Dream hesitates. “What else can you tell us Purpled?”

“That my brother’s an idiot and will follow after Quackity and follow his lead, even if he doesn’t trust his actions – Punz trusts *him*. Whatever that means, I’m a bit sick of it.”

“What does that mean?” Tommy narrows his eyes.

“Beats me,” Purpled shrugs his shoulders and jumps off the counter. “I’m going to the backyard.” Is his silent motion to wanting a quick drag. “I’ll answer your questions in a minute. Or you can leave.” Purpled offers and then bolts out of the room as the brothers turn to each other. Tommy notices how Sapnap’s eyebrows are furrowed, and he mutters words under his breath that are too quiet to hear.

It’s likely about Quackity – Sapnap is probably confused about how they got to this situation where they are doubting Quackity’s motives and basically back where they started.

“I’m going to talk to him outside,” Sapnap says after a moment’s hesitation. “Wait here.”

“We’re not going anywhere,” Dream says as Sapnap opens the sliding doors into the backyard, joining Purpled on the porch. Tommy notices how Sapnap inches closer and points at the cigarette in his hand. Purpled backs off but they begin talking.

Tommy hasn’t seen Sapnap as close to anyone like this before. Of course, he is dating Karl and Quackity, but Tommy means it in a brotherly way. Sure, there is Dream, him, and once George, but Sapnap is different with Purpled. (Theseus never meets Gray. Gray never meets Theseus.)

Tommy meets Purpled though. And he knows that Purpled holds a friendship with Purpled that is indestructible and can withstand years apart – hence the previous years that they are separated.

“Tommy,” Dream speaks, and Tommy turns to him. “What do you think?”

“What do I think of what?”

Dream exhales. “Of what Purpled said.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t know. There’s no reason for him to lie.”

“There isn’t, I agree.” Purpled won’t lie if Punz tells him to. Purpled has some form of connection to Sapnap. “Besides, I see it in him. He wants to take down The Academy more than we do. Siding with Punz and Quackity will only delay it further.”

“It won’t delay it; they’ll be coming back in a couple of weeks.”

“I don’t trust Quackity for his plan after two weeks. He’s left his agency with us, with a brief plan and barely any resources. There’s a lot we can’t do until he arrives.” Then, Dream adds. “He isn’t trustworthy, Tommy. I don’t think I can trust him enough to lead the mission.”

“He doesn’t want to save the children, does he?”

“That’s not his intention,” Dream denies. “We can ignore the facts all we want; we can pretend that Wilbur is lying and Purpled isn’t saying the truth. We can ignore it, but I don’t think we should.”

Sapnap and Purpled walk back into the living room. Sapnap has his long arm shoved around Purpled’s shoulders, who scoffs and attempts to shove him away. Sapnap grins, nudging him. “Go on, tell him.”

“What?” Dream stands. Tommy notices how Purpled cannot look Dream in the eye. Assassins do not fear others but Purpled fears him.

“Purpled’s with us.”

“I’m with however will save those kids and take down the place first,” Purpled corrects him.

“Purpled’s with us,” Sapnap repeats, and his eyes shine a little brighter.

The only question is – who are *they* with?

“Quackity’s hiding something big,” Purpled continues. “You’re dating a loser, Sapnap.”

Sapnap’s grin drops. “What the fuck, man?”

“I don’t trust him. For some fucking reason, Punz does, and I don’t forgive him for that.” Purpled says. “He doesn’t understand that we need this, and this isn’t a fucking job, to prance around Quackity because of some loyalty bullshit.”

“Prance?” Sapnap blinks at his wording. “Uh, ok, sure, okay. But you’re in?”

“Yeah,” Purpled confirms. “I am.”

Eight tells George his real name.

“I’m going to keep calling you Eight,” George tells him.

Eight groans. “I’ll call you *Graduate Two* then.”

George glares and Eight shuts up. They basket each other’s company for three days. George does not give himself away, he doesn’t usually. Eight is slightly reserved as well, he is wary of George’s motives, and his eyes flash when George shouts. But they are both strong – Eight being a Graduate (only the strongest survive) so George decides that he will stay.

George finds Eight to be pessimistic. He has a dry humor and swears enough for the both of them.

Eight reminds George of Theseus.

George is driving on the third day, when Eight says, “I’m still surprised you haven’t killed me yet.”

George does not glance at him. He keeps his eyes on the long road in front of him and pretends to barely acknowledge Eight’s words. After all, George cannot get attached. He refuses. They will help each other. George helps Eight stay alive and Eight assists him.

Care is connection, connection is care. They both result in death.

(But George is immortal now, so the words feel meaningless.)

“Do you want me to?” George responds. “It’s not too late.”

“I’m good, thanks.”

George mutters, “Then don’t mention it again.”

“You’re different from how I remember you,” Eight remarks.

George smirks, “Yeah?” The road keeps going, and plain fields corner them in. They will not arrive at their destination for a while.

George is four years older than Eight. So, when Eight is fifteen, George has graduated long ago – and takes many of his classes. “You were always so empty. A lot of us could decipher Dream and tell when he was disappointed or mad at our class. But with you, no one could read you.”

George doesn’t respond.

“It’s strange because I think I can read you now.”

“It’s not too late to throw you out of the car,”

“You’re disturbed,” Eight snickers. “Irritated.”

George finally turns to him, with a glare. Eight chuckles.

“Idiot.” But Eight is a painful reminder of Theseus. Theseus is annoying and makes jokes when he

shouldn't. Theseus gets under his skin with the clear intention to get a rise out of him.

Eight notices George remain quiet. He is silent for the rest of the ride, as they park at an empty motel. They manage to break their way into two of the empty ones, although the beds are unmade and the bathroom stinks.

"It will do for the night," George says curtly. "I'll wake you up tomorrow."

"Where are we going? You haven't told me." George hasn't told him a thing. For all Eight knows, George could be leading him to his death.

Although if he was, George would have killed him a long time ago.

"I'll explain in the morning."

George has a plan. One he makes up a while ago, one that will take time to complete. George remembers the name of an agency, in the back of his mind, one that stays with him since the Contest. It is an event he partakes in every year with Dream and Sapnap, Theseus once as well. He remembers an agency with golden eyes and grins. They were separate – different from the others. They did not have the best competitors, but they have different methods. In a world where the agencies are cruel and deadly, they are the least cruel and least bad among the worse. Willow College.

So, George will find them and propose an alliance. An offer, to take The Academy down. He researches their agency for weeks straight and misses sleep in the process. But he finds a location and he knows where to seek them.

It is George's plan – an offering to take them down. George does not know what they will want in return, or if they will join in his mission. He will try. George will not let down his family.

Sometimes Theseus sees the faces again.

They disappear as the testing continues. As they pump the drugs into his veins, he forgets them.

Yet there are times when the pale faces flash within him and all he can see is the crimson sight of blood.

The first time Theseus has a nightmare about one of his missions, he wakes up at five – an hour earlier than he is meant to be up, and he must control his racing heart. They are not allowed to awake earlier than six, so he must lay in bed, struggling to keep his eyes open. When he closes them, the faces flash, so he fights to keep them open.

He loses an hour of sleep, and the day moves slowly. He is clumsy and almost drops his breakfast on the floor. During George's language lesson, he slacks, and George must make him write his corrections on ten white pages – the standard exercise to fix mistakes. When he finishes, his fingers

throb and his eyes ache.

He skips lunch. He cannot stomach food. Not when dead eyes stare at him. Not when the dead eyes ask him, why he deserves to live when they do not.

Dream catches on fairly quickly. It is during their recreation period, when Dream marches up to him, and grips his shoulders. “What is wrong with you today?”

“What?” Theseus asks, but his voice sounds too tired to be his own. Theseus is not meant to be tired. He is the youngest assassin to be selected to complete missions – not even Dream at his age had completed them. So, he must be strong. For them, and himself.

“George told me what happened during your lesson,” Dream frowns. “That shouldn’t happen, Theseus. That’s not like you.”

Theseus stares at Dream, and for a second, he can hardly see him. He struggles on his feet. His heart still races.

“Theseus?” Dream repeats and snaps his fingers in his face. “What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m fine,” Theseus forces his bearing arms away. “I have to go.”

Dream frowns. “I know you don’t.” He calls Sapnap and George over. They pester him and ask him questions, but Theseus does not relent.

“We might have to tell someone, Theseus,” Sapnap says and Theseus’ face snaps to him. “Not because we want to, so we need to know what happened.”

“You won’t say shit,” Theseus responds and Sapnap cannot respond quickly because he knows that Theseus is true.

It continues for a while: Theseus’ increasing lack of sleep and the nightmares and faces.

But like always – somehow, Dream finds out.

“You’re not eating enough,” Dream announces. “You’re not sleeping enough, either.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You act like I don’t know these things,” Dream glares. “I know everything, Theseus.”

Theseus rolls his eyes. Dream keeps an eye on him during meals and Theseus hears him enter their room at night. He does not sleep for very long, though. The faces appear when he closes his eyes, and he refuses to let them take hold of him and control his thoughts.

Sometimes he sees them in front of him. Lost souls with nowhere to go; their heads are tilted, and they hum in wonder. Sometimes, Theseus stumbles when he sees them in his mind. Theseus is not meant to stumble.

The dreams and memories disappear. Not on their own accord. Theseus is taken away for more testing. They latch tubes to his skin, and he is given enough gas until he is empty.

When he wakes up, he forgets.

He can sleep again. He can eat.

Dream doesn't believe him. He narrows his eyes and whispers in Sapnap's ears. Theseus overhears him say once, '*something's wrong with him.*'

Nothing is wrong with Theseus, however.

(He realizes that he is the freest he has ever been when he forgets.)

There is not a passing day that Sapnap does not think of George.

His heart aches and he wishes George could have lived.

George is only twenty-one when he passes. Sapnap realizes that he will never feel freedom. He will never live a life away from murder, blood, and conditioning. He will never experience what it is to feel love. He will never live in a small apartment with his brothers for as long as he wants, waking up to light sunsets and the sound of cooking. There are a lot of things George won't be able to do – and Sapnap's heart hurts when he thinks about it.

He sees the fire in his dreams and wonders if he would have fought against it, to save his brother. *George is his brother, he confirms.* Nothing more, nothing less.

Although, it takes a while for them to admit it.

They are cold and uncaring, at first. They are joined together by Dream and their titles. At first, Sapnap has the urge to prove something to George – that although he's the youngest of the three, that does not make him any less strong. George proves something too – that even though he is the brains, he can take Sapnap down too.

They slowly open up. They slowly begin a friendship.

It is slow and steady, and very unlike George and Dream's, or Sapnap and Dream's bond. Not that they can call it that at The Academy. They are associates. Graduates. They work together because they are the best, and nothing else.

They do not call it a *friendship*, but perhaps they do, under their breaths when they do not know what else to call it. They don't know anything else – this is the way they are taught. Because 'friendship' is care, and care is connection.

Connection is death. Care is death.

Then they are introduced to Theseus, and Sapnap learns more. Over time, Theseus becomes closer and stronger. He stands around Dream and makes it his mission to impress him.

One day, Sapnap hears Dream call Theseus his younger brother – and finally, Sapnap understands.

They are not like Dream and Theseus – who will joke and mock one another with names. George and Sapnap's unspoken alliance with one another establishes a friendship. They assist one another

in missions and pull the other up when one is down.

Sapnap now is twenty and whispers the word, *brother*, under his breath – knowing that George would have laughed at him if he had heard. George would have also been twenty-one. One day Sapnap will be his age. One day Sapnap will be older.

It hurts, Sapnap knows. The fire he feels on his skin, and the punches of his classmates are wavering pain, which does not last. The cuts and bruises on his skin do not hurt. Grief hurts, though, Sapnap knows now. Grief does not go away.

They return to *Las Nevadas*; Sapnap, Dream, Tommy, and Purpled.

Entering Quackity's office, they come face-to-face with Karl, Slime, and Antfrost.

Tommy almost swears and can almost sense the argument that is about to be let loose.

"Sapnap," Karl frowns. "Where were you?"

"Out," Sapnap says back.

"Where?" Karl asks and Sapnap scoffs.

"Why do you need to know, Karl?"

"You were out with Tommy," Karl says, and his voice softens. "You know that isn't safe."

Purpled interrupts. "I think I'm missing a few things, Sapnap." He mutters, annoyed. Tommy knows that although he and Sapnap meet up before, there are still a lot of things they have to catch up on. One of them being the money on Tommy's head, that The Academy sends out months ago. He almost forgets but is reminded of the shiver up his sleeve when he steps outside.

"I'll explain," Sapnap reassures, and turns around back to Karl. "We went to find Purpled if you were that curious."

"You can't have just told me that?"

"I didn't think it was necessary."

"Trouble in paradise?" Purpled interrupts again with a smirk, and Tommy lets out a loud laugh, which is cut short when Sapnap glares at him with red eyes.

"Hello, Purpled," Slime nods. "I am Slimecicle from Las Nevadas."

Purpled nods and rubs the back of his head. "Hey, Slimecicle."

"Where are you from?" Slime's answer is not answered as Antfrost steps forward.

“Purpled?” He asks and raises an eyebrow. “What are you doing here?”

“You know him?” Karl and Sapnap ask at the same time.

“Punz introduced me a long time ago. He asked me to keep an eye on you since he’s gone – and make sure you don’t come here when he’s away.”

“He’ll live,” Purpled rolls his eyes. “It’s not a big deal.”

“You shouldn’t be here.”

“It’s fine, Antfrost. We brought him here.” Sapnap crosses his arms over his chest.

“Shut up, Sapnap,” Antfrost glares, and Karl steps in.

“Hey!” Karl shoots him a look. “I don’t think now is the time.”

“Where are you from?” Slime repeats and Tommy can see in Purpled’s face that he is partially confused and partially unable to answer that question. Tommy cannot answer it himself, either. Neither can Sapnap and Dream. Tommy is not from The Academy, and he isn’t Philza’s either.

(But it is a thought for another time, another day.)

Karl plays peacemaker, and they somehow manage to sit down on the couches in a civil matter. Tommy finds himself squished between his brothers, who glare forward, mainly at Antfrost who mirrors their faces. Tommy knows that Antfrost is scared though, Dream and Sapnap were the two scariest agents of The Academy. George was a close third.

“Can you explain why Purpled is here?” Karl asks, keeping his voice stable although Tommy notices his right eye twitch as he contains any emotion.

“He’s working with us now,” Sapnap says. “To take down The Academy.”

“I was always *working* with you,” Purpled interjects. “I agreed to this shit weeks ago.”

“Shut up, Purpled.”

“Sheesh,” Purpled stretches out the word. “Someone’s not in a good mood.”

Before Tommy can laugh again, Sapnap snaps his head in his direction, his eyes on flames with fiery words that say, ‘don’t say anything.’ Although it would be amusing to get the rise out of him, Sapnap sits so close to Tommy, that he thinks that his ribs will break if Sapnap tries anything. So, he keeps his mouth shut.

“Purpled isn’t joining,” Antfrost denies and Purpled is quick to disagree.

“Why the fuck not?” Purpled snaps.

“Punz wouldn’t want you to.”

“I don’t know why you’re speaking on behalf of my brother,” Purpled glares and Sapnap turns to watch the boy carefully. “This is my decision; I chose to join.”

“Antfrost,” Karl interrupts. “It’s fine. You won’t be able to stop him, anyway.” Purpled nods his head in agreement. “We need all the help we can get.”

“It’s not *necessary*,” Tommy suspects Antfrost must care about Purpled. It is evident in his defensive attitude, and the glances he will send him. Antfrost is one of Punz’s closest friends, so Tommy assumes that perhaps Antfrost has been there to see Purpled since he arrived at Las Nevadas – until Karl and Slime who only find out about him today.

“Now that that’s out of the way,” Sapnap coughs. “Any updates on Quackity?”

The room stays silent, which answers Sapnap’s question.

He frowns. “Has he texted you, Karl?”

“No,” Karl mutters. “Has Punz talked to you Purpled?”

“No, he’s horrible at checking his phone.”

“He left us right before the mission,” Dream says. “And gave us the duty of training the agents and preparing the weapon storage.”

“Quackity from Las Nevadas is speaking with other agencies,” Slime interrupts. “We will have more support if his meetings are successful.”

“Do we know their names?”

“Willow Agency,” Slime says fast before Antfrost can. “There is also Empire Ensemble, although Quackity did not tell us any others.”

Sapnap and Dream glance at each other. Theseus remembers the name, Willow College, from somewhere in his memory.

“Do you know them?” Purpled understands the glance.

Sapnap nods. “We completed in the Contest against them. Dream knew a few people who worked there.”

“Their methods are different,” Dream remembers. “They aren’t like The Academy,” Dream turns to Tommy. “Do you remember?”

Tommy thinks. “The Contest,” Dream confirms with a head nod. “A bit, yeah?”

“What contest?” Karl asks and Sapnap promises he will explain later.

“They were the least cruel,” Dream recalls. “Everyone was cruel, but they were the least. It was less about leaving a mark – their kills were silent.” Dream, Sapnap, and Tommy will slash the letter ‘A’ on the skin of their murders. Willow College leaves unheard. They are not known for their power or control. Rather their unusual methods and practices and differences in their agents.

“I wonder why Quackity has chosen them specifically,” Antfrost thinks aloud. “It is strange that the meetings will occur before the mission will begin.”

“It’s too convenient for him,” Tommy sees distrust swallow Dream. The older assassin stands and nods in Antfrost’s direction. “Call the shipment services and give me an estimate on their arrival.”

“I haven’t been successful in contacting them. Quackity told me they were a nuisance.”

Dream swallows. Sapnap does not want to believe what he is hearing.

“You will contact them,” Dream demands. “You will find a way to be notified of when they will arrive.”

“But—”

“If you cannot do this, then there is a chance there are no weapons coming to begin with,” Dream glares and the room registers his words. Sapnap registers first, standing in front of his brother, eyes on him directly.

“Dream,” he warns. “You’re not thinking...”

“You’re being thoughtless,” Dream frowns. “Consider it, Sapnap. Don’t ignore the possibility.”

“He wouldn’t do that,” Sapnap denies. “He won’t neglect the mission.” Tommy thinks that he is about to say *when he knows what the mission means to us*, however, the words are caught on his tongue, and Sapnap swallows.

“Let’s say the weapons aren’t coming,” Antfrost tests. “That the weapons aren’t coming, and neither is Quackity in two weeks. Then what?”

“Quackity is coming,” Slime confirms. “He told us yesterday, that he will be coming back in fourteen days.”

“If Quackity doesn’t come,” Dream starts, and all eyes turn to him. Tommy feels nauseous when Dream peers over at him specifically as if he is analyzing his face and waiting for a reaction. “*If* he does not come, and neither does the weapons, then we’ll resort to Plan B.”

“But he’ll come,” Karl steps forward. “Right?”

Purpled scoffs. “What do you think, Karl? He hasn’t texted you back or updated you. He’s neglecting a mission that you guys have been working on for weeks.” He adds under his breath, ‘some boyfriend he is.’ Sapnap turns to him, with warning eyes.

“Purpled is right, though,” Antfrost resigns with the assumption. Although it physically hurts him to admit Quackity’s potential betrayal, he understands the facts have aligned and everything helps the current situation. “He’s right, Karl.”

Karl goes silent. “What’s Plan B?” He then says.

Dream’s eyes stay on Tommy. Tommy knows his next words before he says them.

“We’ll pay Philza a visit,” Dream says. “And we’ll give him a proposal he cannot refuse.”

George does not sleep.

The wind presses against his skin and his eyelashes flutter. He sees stars and light-colored eyes

when he closes his eyes, and the nostalgia makes his heart burn.

He knows they are out there – he knows they are waiting.

But George comes to his senses and allows the coldness to engulf him when he remembers that they think that he is dead. Sapnap will find Dream and Theseus and admit that George burns along with the flames. George assumes they will mourn for a day. Dream may take it the worst.

But they will get over it, as they are trained to. They cannot dwindle on death when death is so apparent.

George does not want to be alive.

It is his truth; he would rather be gone. He would rather allow the flames to eat him alive and leave the world which gave him nothing in return. But first, he promises that he will save The Academy and bring it justice. He will see Dream one last time, apologize to Sapnap and Theseus, and then he will be gone for good.

Although George is not sure how that will happen. He isn't sure how he's meant to die. Immortality has its limit, surely. There must be boundaries – there must be a way of death that he hasn't tested.

George sighs. The air around him turns white and his lips are frosted.

He hears footsteps. They are Eight's. George can assume by the hesitation.

He keeps his eyes closed. "What do you want?"

Eight knows that George can hear him as soon as he steps out of his motel room. (Not that George is keeping an ear out for him.) "Why are you outside?"

George sighs and opens both eyes. "Can I not get a moment's peace?"

"It's cold as shit." Neither are affected by the weather, Eight only mentions it to change the topic.

"Sure, Eight."

Eight sighs. "I've been a graduate for two years."

"And you still call me George."

"Fine, Graduate *fucking* two."

George almost laughs. Eight glances around. "Can I sit?" George leans on the side of his car, and the cement under him keeps his palms cold. George shrugs his shoulders, and Eight sits down, keeping his distance.

The truth is that George does not refer to Eight by his real name, as he simply cannot afford to. He cannot afford to grow a connection to the kid when he could be gone so easily. George calls Theseus 'Sixteen' for a long time until he finally refers to him by his real name.

(It takes a while for George to truly understand that Theseus is not dying anytime soon.)

"You know what I've noticed George?" George does not respond. "It's like you're missing something."

“I don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I think you do,” Eight smirks. “You’re missing someone. Someone a part of you. You’ve forgotten a can read faces easily.”

George is not vulnerable. George’s faces are stoic and do not share emotion.

Yet Eight persists. Eight wants a reaction – Eight wants him to admit something.

Unlucky for Eight, George does not.

“I noticed it the first time, in the hotel room. You’re incomplete, and there’s something you’re looking for. I notice it now more than ever.”

“Eight,” George says slowly. “What were you told exactly?”

“By the Headmaster?” Eight hesitates. “They did not really admit much. We just needed to find you, or we were going to be killed.”

“What about Dream?” George asks. “And Sapnap?”

Eight almost hesitates. “That Sapnap burned down The Academy and Dream wasn’t really mentioned. They were silent about you for a while, I told you this though. Until rumors started spreading, and we found out that you escaped. Anyone who said Dream’s name was punished so everyone stopped asking.”

“Some came to the conclusion he left,” Eight admits. “They don’t tell us anything, the Teachers, I mean.”

“And the Headmaster?”

“We didn’t see them much, not like usual. I only saw him once before I went to find you,” Eight turns to him. “Is it my turn to ask questions, now?”

George rolls his eyes and stretches his back. “If you insist, I guess.”

“Why haven’t you gone to find Sapnap and Dream?” Eight asks and George freezes. “You know where they are, I don’t understand why we aren’t finding them.”

George turns away. He allows his face to turn empty and he waits for his mind to settle. It is not because he does not want to find them. He simply cannot.

“My plan requires waiting,” George admits. “I can’t go to them now.”

“Sapnap thinks you’re dead,” Eight scoffs. “You could call them; you could communicate with them somehow to prove to them that you’re alive. They’re grieving.”

“Shut up,” George finally snaps. “I know what I’m doing, Eight.”

“You care about them—”

“Care is connection. Connection is death,” George recites the words engraved into his soul. “They won’t care I’m dead, either. It was going to happen eventually.” Death is not new to them, George knows. They will get over it. Then George will make his appearance, and everything will go back to normal.

(That is, until George leaves again. He promises one night with Dream, under the stars and glare of the moon, and then he will leave.)

“I think it was obvious to anyone that you cared,” Eight shrugs. “You can deny it, but you and Dream were friends. You were an exception since you two were the best assassins.”

“We weren’t friends,” George says curtly.

Eight smirks. “Sure.”

In a second, George snaps his head, and his fingers threaten to curl. He feels his face heat and a wave of anger rise within him. But he controls his emotions because he is not meant to have any. He is George and he is emotionless and does not allow anger to regulate him.

“I can’t have friends; I wasn’t an exception. No one was, to The Academy,” George mutters. “Not Dream, or Sapnap, or even fucking *Theseus*.”

“Theseus?” Eight raises an eyebrow. “Your fourth?”

George does not allow feelings to control him, yet he still feels anger at the revelation years ago. At Dream’s desperation, and the words that sealed their futures. Their final mission.

“We weren’t an exception, not even to The Academy,” George says, and then he admits. “The Academy had one final mission for us because apparently, one wasn’t enough for us.”

“Oh,” Eight sighs and listens.

“Dream found the file room with the papers on every student a while back. He found Theseus’, and we found out that the kid was never going to make it to Graduation,” George pauses. “He was never going to make it because they were going to make us kill him before he could.”

Eight lightly gasps. “He saw you getting close?”

“Dream had him under his wing. He had faith in the kid, and over time, so did Sapnap and me. We knew he could outlive everyone; we saw it within him. The Academy saw it too and wanted to get rid of our weakness, I guess,” Him.

“That’s why Dream left,” Eight finally realizes. “That’s why he is gone.”

George nods his head. It is the reason why Dream is gone, and why he took Theseus with him.

“So, they’re out there somewhere,” Eight says. “And they think you’re dead.”

George does not need to nod his head for Eight to understand his answer.

“I think it’s bullshit,” Eight says. “That you have them, and you’re not willing to find them again.”

“You don’t understand my plan, Eight.”

“Because you won’t tell me a fucking thing!”

“I can’t find them,” George turns to him. “Not yet.”

Eight stands and glances down at him one final time. George ignores his scowl. “Sure. I’m going to sleep, don’t wake me up since I won’t open the door.” They sleep in locked rooms because they are the most vulnerable when they are unconscious. Eight leaves then, and George is alone again.

He lifts his head to the sky and realizes the stars are gone. George sighs and his palms are cold again.

He misses Dream, Sapnap, and Theseus. Although he will not change his plans, not after this long.

(But they are truly, all he has left.)

George will live forever. He is immortal. He realizes that one day, they will leave him behind. They are assassins and they will not be killed. But one day, death will arrive, and George will be left alone.

George's decision is after the mission, after all of this is over, he will find a way to pass. Dream will hate him, and Sapnap won't talk to him for days for not contacting him after the events of the burning academy – but it is the easiest way for them to ruin the building friendships between them. That way, it will be easier when he passes.

George closes his eyes and rests for a while. Although he is still alert; he hears every surrounding movement and there is a knife in his right pocket and another strapped to his right leg.

He opens his eyes to snow. White falls from the sky suddenly and rests on his fingertips as ice. So, George resigns from the coldness, back to the motel room. He may sleep tonight. George may dream as well; of a lifetime when he can finally be free.

Chapter End Notes

40 chapters! thanks for everyone whos stuck around :))

comment and bookmark so ur notified of updates because i'm going to try update a bit more frequently. i'm just always busy with school haha

ill finish editing this chapter tomorrow morning. thank u for reading!

Defense

Chapter Summary

Sapnap blinks, processing his words, and then he scowls. “No, shut up.” He points at his tray. “They changed the food! They never change the food.”

Theseus shrugs his shoulders and smirks. “They kept the pudding.”

“Shut up and eat your damn food.” Sapnap keeps the scowl on his face for the rest of the meal. Today, it is just them as George and Dream are out on a mission. They will return tomorrow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy begins dreaming again.

Although this time, he does not hold a gun and there are no empty faces with bloodshot eyes and bleeding faces surrounding him. Nor do the faces of his past sing similar words with harsh whispers as they usually do. He is not in the white room either, and he does not dream of Wilbur, Techno, Philza, and the life had before.

This time, he lays down on a bed in the testing rooms. Though, now, he is not alone.

There is a glass wall that divides him from another bed, another room. His body is sore, and he feels every feeling and movement of his soul. He is able to turn his head a slight fraction, to reach the other side of the glass somehow.

Tommy sees a boy. And then he wakes up.

He is drowsy at breakfast, as he stays up to think of the face and why it feels so familiar. It sparks something in his mind, yet he can't grasp the thought. Dream's protein shakes do not help, and neither do Sapnap's loud words. They stick on schedule, and even with Dream's 'Plan B' of ditching Quackity for *Philza*, he still expects them to wake up early, to train – and drink his shakes.

They don't taste horrible, but a bitter taste is left in his mouth. Sapnap passes him a glass of water when he is finished and takes the now-empty protein drink away. “You seem tired,” Sapnap notes.

Tommy does not tell him about the dream. He doesn't plan on telling Dream either – not until he can figure out the game his mind decides to play. “I'm always tired, Sapnap,” He jokes.

“You should get that checked out.” Sapnap smirks and Tommy flips him off as he buries his head in his arms.

Dream enters the room, and Tommy knows that his eyebrows would be raised in his direction, as he glances at Sapnap with curiosity. “What's with you this morning?”

“He's tired,” Sapnap chuckles. “He's been quiet all morning.”

"I'm right here," Tommy grumbles and lifts his head, to peer over at his oldest brother. "Are we going down to train?"

Dream's frown deepens. "Did you sleep last night?"

Tommy freezes. He forgets Dream knows him well. That, or the black bags under his eyes are evident.

"Yes," Tommy responds quickly. "I slept fine."

Sapnap and Dream exchange glances. "We promised we were going to be more honest with each other a while ago," Dream reminds him.

"I know," Tommy meets Dream's intense stare. "Are we leaving then?"

Dream watches for a second longer. When he figures out Tommy won't break and relent to his questions, he nods his head, and they head down to the training hall. Sapnap will join them afterward. He will first meet with Antfrost, and they will discuss the mission further. Dream tells Tommy the previous night, that they will be heading to Philza's in a few days if everything works in accordance.

("You don't have to talk to him," Dream reassures. "We'll be negotiating, and I'll propose a few offers. After that, we'll head straight back.")

"What are you proposing?"

"He'll receive what he wants, and so will we. He wants to take The Academy down and we have the agents to help him so. Plus, he can't exactly take them down without the expertise that we have.")

When they arrive at the training halls, they stay there for around two hours. They start on the treadmill for a while before they start sparring and throwing knives. Dream manages to make everything a competition and Tommy doesn't mind the distraction. At times he is close to admitting the strange yet familiar boy in his dreams, but he doesn't.

Before they head off to Dream's lessons, Dream decides they will go outside today to try shooting practice. They don't use guns regularly so the older thinks it's an important skill to work on.

They are anything but imperfect. Although Tommy takes three shots to adjust to the noise and four to finally feel confident with the metal in his hand, after being away from one, for so long; his bullets hit the bullseye every single time. Dream nods his head, impressed, and the morning remains successful.

They head to Dream's lessons then. They are all eighteen in this class and Tommy doesn't recognize any of them from Dream's previous classes. So, he decides to stand by the back wall, as Dream does demonstrations and shows off a couple of defenses since he does not feel like being in the spotlight today. Dream senses it too since he does not choose him to help him with teaching instead, he chooses a boy called Omar who is shoved forward by his classmates. Tommy notices how his friends yell and laugh when he messes up but begins to cheer when Dream commends his technique.

At some point, Purpled shows up. Tommy suspects that Sapnap has told him where they were, and Tommy's thoughts are confirmed when Purpled leans on the wall by him. "Sapnap told me that you guys were in here taking a few classes this morning."

“Just three today,” Tommy responds. “What’s Sapnap doing?”

“He’s still with Antfrost. I think he would have exploded if I was there any second longer,” Purpled smirks, although it drops when he sees Dream at the front of the class. “Is he uh, doing demonstrations?”

Tommy does not respond. He lets Purpled see for himself.

(Although Purpled may never admit it, there is a fear that settles in his pupils at Dream’s presence.)

Purpled will not have a good experience with teaching and lessons. Dream is regularly taking lessons, and surely takes a few of Purpled’s. He hits students if they misbehave or do not perform to standards. Purpled would have been victim to this a few times, as no one is an exception. Even if he had a connection to Sapnap, Dream could never hold back.

Tommy notices how Purpled’s awareness is high, and he watches Dream carefully as Omar stands by him. It is as if Purpled expects Dream to hurt Omar if the boy makes one wrong move.

But Dream grins and smiles. He pats Omar’s back, who joins his friends back in a disordered line.

Tommy responds to Purpled’s silent confusion. “We aren’t there anymore.”

“I know,” Purpled whispers. It is hard to believe sometimes, Tommy knows. It is evident in Purpled’s eyes – disbelief. “It’s just strange.”

“I get it,” Tommy nods and looks away when Dream’s eyes settle back to them, noticing Purpled’s presence. “He couldn’t look me in the eye sometimes. He didn’t want to do it.”

“I know,” Purpled sighs. “I know.”

They live long enough to become a villain. Younger students would have viewed Dream in fear, scared by him even standing in the same room as them, as he could be brutal. It is why he started taking the higher classes, and Sapnap mainly took the younger ones.

Tommy wonders if they had never left, then if Dream would have lived long enough to become an Instructor. Instructors seem young to them, but if they were as young as they seemed, they would be utilized as assassins.

(*Die a hero*, Tommy thinks in his mind. Like George and the agents before him. Or live long enough to become a villain.)

The class disbands then, as they take out their mats and begin the exercises that Dream teaches beforehand.

Tommy and Purpled remain silent as they watch. Purpled snorts at one point. “They really think they have a chance, huh?”

Tommy glances at him, with furrowed eyebrows. “What?”

“Their technique is horrible, Tommy. There is no way in hell we’ll even be close to taking The Academy down.” Purpled frowns. “Sure, we have numbers, but numbers don’t mean anything when we’re against assassins who are trained since the age of ten.”

Purpled continues. “We have what? A week and a half left? I doubt anyone will make any progress.

We've lost already."

"I..." Tommy pauses and crosses his arms over his chest. "Give it time."

"That's one thing we don't have," Purpled refuses. "What happens when The Academy grows larger? What happens when they progress in whatever they're planning? You know they have a number on your head, Tommy. Thousands. I can't be the only one who sees this."

"You're not," Tommy glares. "We all see it. Sapnap and Dream see it too. But it's all we can do right now, our only option is to train these agents and do the best fucking job we can."

"It's not enough."

Tommy knows it's not enough. But it is the first time someone has said it aloud, and not kept it to themselves.

"There isn't anything else we can do, Purpled," Tommy sighs. "Dream was the best agent at The Academy, so at least we have that. And... if Dream's proposal goes well then Philza's agents will be well trained. Our mission isn't to hurt the children or any of the agents there, so we have no reason to think about how our agents are less trained. We think about taking them down and making sure the agency does not continue. We're killing the Headmaster, not the children. We don't need an army of perfect assassins to do that."

Purpled frowns. He opens his mouth and closes it again.

"You can't ignore the problem," Purpled says as they watch the room of agents for a moment longer. Tommy thinks the silence is unbearable. "You have to put some sense into Karl and Sapnap. You know, I told him this morning, that his plan was stupid. Because if I was going to join this shit, then I needed to know that our chances were looking high."

"We're not ignoring anything."

"Just like you're not ignoring Philza?" Purpled asks and Tommy stops. Purpled chuckles. "What about Wilbur? Have you spoken to him recently?"

Dream approaches them, then. He raises an eyebrow in Purpled's direction, and Tommy sees the way that Purpled tries to hide how his reaction. He hides how he is unsure and apprehensive, and forces a blank face onto his features, and a frown with it. "Dream," he nods his head.

"Are you two going to talk, or help out?" Dream's voice is stained with strictness, but there is an underlining lightness.

"Talk," Tommy shrugs. "Do you have a problem with that?"

Dream scoffs and shoves his shoulder. Tommy shoves back and Dream pulls his arm, to pull him forward and trap him in a headlock.

"Dream," Tommy complains, tired.

"I do have a problem with that, actually," Dream says, and Tommy weakly pulls his arms off him. Dream ruffles his hair and pushes him forward. "Go grab the equipment from the storage room. Just take out the boxes with the weights and knives, I need them for my next class."

"That's going to take multiple rounds," Tommy groans, as Purpled remains still and silent.

“You’re fault,”

“For what?” Tommy asks incredulously.

Dream shrugs. “For talking.” He says. “Now hurry up.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and Purpled follows him out of the room into the storage section, where they both grab either side of a wooden plate filled with weapons, to bring them back to the training hall.

“Are you even carrying this thing?” Tommy grunts, as he adjusts his hold. “I swear you’re not even touching the box.”

“I’m stronger than you, Thomas, of course, I’m holding the fucking box.”

“I told you,” Tommy deadpans. He cannot see the smug glance on Purpled’s face, as his body is facing the other way. He holds the front, while Purpled steers from the back. “My name isn’t Thomas.”

“Tommy is short for Thomas, though. Tommy is a nickname.”

“Tommy *is* a nickname,” Tommy confirms. He doesn’t say it is a nickname for Theseus. Then again, it isn’t a nickname. It’s his name. He isn’t Theseus anymore, and never will be again. “Bring it up with Dream if you want to.”

They empty the boxes into the room and return to the storage room. Tommy rolls up the sleeves of his hoodie and catches Purpled staring for a second too long.

“What?” Tommy snaps.

“Tommy...” Purpled gulps. He is too hesitant for his usual blunt self. Tommy stares down to where Purpled is looking, namely his arms where two long stitches ride up his skin, in dead straight rows. “What... happened?”

“They’re normal scars.”

“Normal scars aren’t that straight.”

“I stitched them myself then.”

“Your story is changing,” Purpled snaps. “And no one can stitch in that straight of a fucking line. What happened?”

Tommy does not want to talk about the testing, nor the operations, nor his stitched skin. He rolls down his sleeves and points at another box. “Let’s carry this one now.”

“I’m sorry,” Purpled apologizes immediately. “I shouldn’t have pushed.”

Tommy doesn’t care. Maybe he does, but he won’t admit it.

“It’s fine,” he sighs, tired. He hopes to take his mind off the dream, but his scars once again remind him of the familiar boy on the bed next to his. “Can we just go?”

Purpled nods his head, and luckily, the topic is dropped.

After the lesson is over, and Purpled leaves to grab lunch, Tommy is alone with Dream. As Dream begins to roll the mats in and carry them to the side of the room, Tommy stands, wondering how he

should approach the situation.

He takes two deep breaths in and thinks. He decides on how to bring it up. “Purpled saw the scars.”

Dream glances up from where he concentrates on tossing the mats on top of each other. Tommy notices how he plays a silent game to himself, to throw them and align them perfectly with the one below it. He would apologize for changing his lighthearted features and careless expression – rare emotions he never displays, into something more serious as Dream’s attention is now turned on him and his quiet words.

“What?” Dream ends up saying. “I don’t follow.”

“You know,” Tommy shrugs and shoves his fists into his pockets. “The scars on my arms. The ones they gave to me.”

Dream widens his eyes. Dream understands. He walks towards Tommy and stands by him. “Did you tell him?”

“No,” Tommy says.

“That’s okay. You don’t have to tell anyone.” Tommy tells Dream and Sapnap because he, well, he trusts them. He doesn’t want another soul knowing his vulnerability – how he fails to be their fourth.

“What’s going on?” Dream furrows his eyebrows. “You’re thinking.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Well, it’s obviously something, kid.”

A year ago, Tommy could not hold this conversation with Dream. They could not be this close – they could not afford to.

“I had a dream last night,” Tommy ends up saying, and they sit down on the ground as Tommy struggles to find the words. “Of another boy.”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy sighs and stares at the crack between the floorboards. “I don’t see his face, or him really, but I knew he was there. It was back at The Academy when we were getting tested.”

I thought I was alone, Tommy wants to say. For all this time, I thought I was alone.

“They never mentioned anyone else,” Tommy whispers. “But there was another boy there, Dream, I swear on it. It felt so real.”

“It makes sense,” Dream murmurs. “With what they were doing to you, I’d be surprised if they stopped there.”

“What?” Tommy is tired. So tired.

“You told me... you told me that they put things into you,” Dream’s voice almost breaks. “They’d test it on others, if it couldn’t work on you, they wouldn’t stop from what they were planning.”

I failed, Tommy thinks. *I couldn’t even be your fourth.*

“You don’t need to be our fourth,” Dream reads his mind because is Dream and knows Tommy the best in the world – more than anyone else. “You don’t need to be what they wanted you to be, Tommy.”

“They didn’t stop with me,” Tommy sighs, ignoring his words. “They kept going?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if it didn’t start with you either. There may be many older agents, maybe older than me, who were subjected to The Academy’s plans. Which is why we have to stop them – so they don’t go on.”

“Purpled said... that we don’t have a chance,” Tommy then recites the boy’s words. “I think I get where he’s coming from. Do we even stand a chance at this point?”

“I think we do,” Dream nods. “You don’t have to tell me what he said though, I heard.”

Tommy blinks. “Oh.”

“Oh,” Dream mocks him, and Tommy pushes his shoulder in retaliation. “I understand where he’s coming from. But I think we’ve got an advantage here, Tommy.”

“What?” Tommy asks.

“We have me.”

Tommy snorts. “Good observation, dumbass.”

“Idiot,” Dream knocks his head. “But what does The Academy want most?”

“Oh, you’re being serious.”

“The Academy wants Sapnap and me back. They want you too – with the money they’ve placed on you. And they will do anything they can, because we are the most valued Graduates they have, and they are nothing without us.”

“I guess, yeah.”

“We have an advantage here, Tommy. And either, we can utilize the advantage,” He balls up his fist, before laying his palm flat as he then says. “...or we can let it go to waste.”

“So?”

“We’ll play how The Academy wants us to play. We will attack and then we will relent. Do you understand where I’m going with this?” Tommy nods his head. “Sure, Sapnap and I haven’t figured out... many of the details. And we have to go over this with Philza when we join him. But we know now that we’ll be okay, we will win.”

(What Dream does not say – is that they will win, or he will die fighting till the very end.)

“Yeah,” Tommy nods. “Yeah.”

(What Tommy does not say is that he will do whatever he can to make sure his brothers do not have to ‘survive’ anymore and can finally *live*.)

“I’m glad we talked,” Dream smiles lightly. “This is why you talk to me, kid. It makes both of us feel better,”

“Sure,” Tommy yawns.

“Let’s go grab lunch. Should we save a burger for Sapnap?”

“The cafeteria food is too good to waste on him.”

“True,” Dream grins. “Did you want to train after, or you can sleep?”

“I’m not tired,” Tommy yawns again. “Fine. But I’m not sleeping though.”

“Why not?” Dream asks, realizing fast after Tommy scoffs. “I still have some pills left, I guess.”

Tommy stops walking in his path. “Can you hear yourself? You gave me a whole speech about why I had to stop taking them.”

“I’ll only give you one,” Dream says. “So, you won’t be too tired through the day. By the looks of it though, you only got a couple of hours of sleep last night, anyway.”

“Can you tell?”

Dream shrugs. “I don’t think Sapnap can, but you can’t get it past me.”

They enter the cafeteria hall. As they grab their trays, they see what is on special today afternoon.

“They don’t have pudding today,” Tommy complains.

“I think it’s time for you to try something new,” Dream smirks as he grabs two burgers, placing one on Tommy’s plate as he walks past more options, towards the deserts. “How about cheesecake?”

“That sounds gross.”

“It isn’t,” They sit down, and Tommy tries it. He pretends to not like it as much as he does, but maybe Dream catches onto his other lie as well. He usually does, Tommy suspects he forever will.

A tray slams down on the table and Theseus glances up. Sapnap does not seem pleased.

“What?” Theseus raised an eyebrow. “Did the Headmaster demote you to Graduate Four or something? I won’t say that I didn’t expect it.”

Sapnap blinks, processing his words, and then he scowls. “No, shut up.” He points at his tray. “They changed the food! They never change the food.”

Theseus shrugs his shoulders and smirks. “They kept the pudding.”

“Shut up and eat your damn food.” Sapnap keeps the scowl on his face for the rest of the meal. Today, it is just them as George and Dream are out on a mission. They will return tomorrow.

Sapnap and Theseus speak quietly and keep up a conversation for a short period. There are still some glances their way, but it had stopped a while ago when the other students in his class had finally realized that Theseus had been silently selected as the Graduate's fourth. Although Graduation was a few years away, it was very rare for Dream to ever have his eyes on a student. In fact, Theseus thinks he is the only one.

So, there are a few glances as Sapnap speaks loudly and complains. But nothing more than a few, anymore.

"I'll complain, I'll go on strike."

"You're not going on strike," Theseus rolls his eyes. "Then they really *will* demote you."

"I don't think they can,"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that if I were you."

"I hope you know how annoying you are," Sapnap grumbles, as he pokes the new food on his plate. Their usual meal consists of a tub of yogurt, a couple of slices of bread, fruit, chicken salad – and pudding. However, today, they remove the yogurt and replace it with sticks of carrot and celery. The bread has grains in it as well, and the fruit is replaced with another side of salad.

Sapnap does not look happy. As he speaks to Theseus about how he would fix their diets, the younger boy manages to steal the pudding from his plate. Sapnap doesn't notice. If he does, he doesn't care. (It is somewhat strange since Sapnap usually puts up a fight. Theseus suspects it is because he is a victim of the white room a week before. He is not fed during his time there, and his bones poke out a little more than usual.)

"How much do you want to bet that George won't give a shit?" Theseus asks the Graduate. "Because I don't think he'll even notice."

"You have yourself a deal." Their negotiations are silent, as bets are a usual occurrence for them. They don't shake hands, as that will cause attention from the watching Teachers, but they kick one another's legs, in a silent agreement.

A few mornings after, Dream and George return. Theseus finds them during their lunch break, as they are already seated. Dream has a new scar on his arm and George's hair is shorter.

The last time Theseus sees it is when it falls in front of his eyes, almost to the point where he can tie it behind his ears. He assumes that the Instructors force him to get a haircut, as George's hair grows at rapid speeds, similar to Sapnap who wears a bandana so it does not fall in his vision during spars.

Theseus grabs a tray and joins them. He sits in his usual seat, next to Dream and in front of Sapnap. George sits diagonally from him. "Sapnap?" Theseus asks then.

Sapnap rolls his eyes and tosses him his pudding.

"What did you bet this time?" Dream raises both his eyebrows. They are all used to each other's antics at this point.

"They changed the menu and Sapnap betted that George was going to make a fuss," Theseus then adds, "As he did. Sapnap got so angry."

"I didn't get angry," Sapnap corrects him. "*However*, they shouldn't have changed it. Whoever did

doesn't realize how I hate grain bread."

George rolls his eyes. "It's not a big deal Sapnap."

"I don't think I can talk to you after this," Sapnap shoves his finger at the bread. "Look at it, Gogs! It's inedible."

As Sapnap and George proceed to argue, Theseus turns to Dream. "How was the mission?" The question is ordinary to them; Theseus likes asking and Dream does not mind answering.

"Not bad," He shows Theseus the scar. "I was a bit too careless though."

"How did you get it?" Theseus stares down at the mark on his arm, and then back at Dream's green eyes.

"The guy threw it at me before George shot him. We didn't know he had a weapon. It won't happen again." Dream then asks, "How were your classes?"

Theseus shrugs, as he stabs his plate of vegetables. The carrots don't taste bad, the celery is horrible, however. "The usual. Another Graduate took over your classes. They were complete shit."

"Really?" Dream asks. "Who?"

Theseus doesn't know. "I didn't pay attention."

"To his name?" Dream shakes his head. "C'mon, kid,"

"I'm not a kid," Theseus frowns. "I'm fifteen."

"I think you're proving my point." They turn back to Sapnap and George who glare at each other. Sapnap is talking a bit too loudly and George looks finished with the conversation. But they both want the last word in the conversation, even if George seems to grow more tired whenever Sapnap opens his mouth to argue.

"Sapnap," Dream interrupts Sapnap, finally, when too many eyes turn their way. "You're loud."

"I won't let them silence me, Dream." Sapnap jokes. He usually isn't serious about small subjects that don't matter. Although sometimes it is difficult to distinguish when Sapnap is being truthful and when he's sarcastic.

"I was told they changed it for better performance rates. By changing our diets to include a higher proportion of vegetables, they expect us to be more alert and attentive."

"Of course, you know, they tell you everything." Sapnap has a silent grudge about that, he has for a long time.

"It won't last forever. You'll go back to your serving of white bread when they don't get the results that they want."

"Won't they?" Theseus questions. "Get the results, I mean?"

"Not if they swap the wrong options. I wouldn't recommend swapping the fruits around,"

"Look at you, Dream," George smirks. "A nutritionist."

"I've picked up a few things," Dream responds innocently.

“Nutritionist Dream.”

Dream picks up a carrot. “What’s this color again?” And George shuts up.

It isn’t common that they’re seated together, joking around with playfulness. It is rare when they are the top three Graduates and are made as an example for all. They are strict, and straightforward, and rude when they need to be. So, Theseus values their mealtimes for what they are, because he rarely gets a chance like this; to not be so on edge, sit a little less straightener and have the opportunity to enjoy conversations with Dream. He should not get used to it.

(At some point in time, he does.)

(The Headmaster watches them carefully.

Interesting, they think, and their eyes do not pull away.)

Tommy wakes up to Dream shaking his shoulder.

“Wake up,” Tommy manages to make out what he says, through the sweeping unconsciousness that tugs him to fall asleep again. “Tommy, we need to go.”

“What?” He murmurs, his head tipping back a fraction as sleep grabs hold of him.

Dream manages to grab ahold of him though, slightly tighter. “We’re going to Quackity’s office. A quick one and you can go to sleep after.”

“Why?” Tommy asks. He doesn’t know why he asks, he’s not listening.

Dream responds, maybe he doesn’t, but Tommy can’t hear him. Dream ends up dragging him up, and steering him into the living room, but holding his shoulders to push him out of the room without hitting the doorway.

“What’s with him?” Tommy can hear Sapnap’s voice somewhere.

Dream’s voice is quieter. “I gave him a sleeping pill.”

“Why the fuck would you do that?”

“He started dreaming again, and I don’t think he’d go to sleep without them...” There is a gap in noise for a second. “He’ll be tired for the rest of the day, but at least he got some sleep.”

“Did he not sleep last night?”

“You are oblivious.”

When they pack into the elevator, Tommy regains his consciousness. Not all of it, but enough for his words to not be slurred, and for him to walk without assistance. He yawns and cracks his neck.

“You know, you’re more manageable when you’re tired,” Sapnap nudges him. “And bearable.” Tommy is too tired to argue back. He reminds himself to punch Sapnap extra hard when he feels more awake.

(He usually would feel weakened by his vulnerability that results from the state of tiredness. But he is between Dream and Sapnap and awake enough to know that he is okay and safe.)

They arrive at Quackity’s office. Antfrost stands by his desk, Karl talking quietly to him. Purpled lays lazily on one of the hard couches, and Slime sits next to him, his back straight and his hands laying on his lap.

“Hello?” Antfrost greets but his phrase comes out more like a question. Karl smiles in Sapnap’s direction and moves across the room to stand by him. Antfrost’s eyes move to Tommy. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Nothing,” Tommy yawns.

Antfrost raises his eyebrows. Dream replies to his questioning glance. “He’s on sleeping medication. He’s tired.”

“Why is he on medication?” Purpled asks couch and Dream glances at Sapnap who shrugs. They do not elaborate on why, and Tommy is thankful. He moves away from his brothers and joins Purpled on the couch.

Purpled whispers in his ear, ‘weak’ and Tommy flips him off.

“Anyway,” Antfrost interrupts. “We are meeting with Philza today night before midnight. He says that he’s busy with meetings all of tomorrow, so it’s the only time we can speak with him.”

Purpled scoffs and Dream pursues his lips. “And any updates on Quackity?”

“Purpled got a response from Punz. He said that they’re entering their first negotiations today.” Antfrost rolls his eyes. “Although Quackity hasn’t said anything.” There is a tense silence before Purpled speaks.

“So what are we even going to mention to Philza? It’s not like he wants anything but his son back.”

Tommy looks up at Purpled’s purple eyes. “What?”

“You heard me,” Purpled says and Sapnap interrupts.

“Purpled, cut it out.”

“I’m only stating the obvious,” The boy raises his hands in surrender. “You know that Tommy is who Philza wants. I don’t think he gives a shit about us joining him or not, not when the benefits outweigh the negatives. You guys were planning to betray him before – what’s going to make him

think that you guys won't do it again?"

"One thing I've gathered from Philza is that he is distrustful of Quackity. They've had things occur in the past – but Philza does not have a grudge with us."

"I mean..." Sapnap is about to say, but Dream stops him.

"We looked after his kid when he couldn't, I think that's enough trust."

"Fine then. But what makes you think that joining with Philza will bring us any step closer towards taking down The Academy," Purpled asks.

Dream responds. "We need to take down the Headmaster – that is our priority. They'll be expecting us, and they'll be waiting with trained agents. So, our agents will be there, to fight off the defense."

"Then we'll come in," Sapnap continues. "We'll get rid of the Headmaster and the Instructors and Teachers while we're at it. Then we will escort the agents back to Philza's institution and we'll go from there."

"You're making this sound easy," Purpled deadpans.

"Sometimes it's better to not be a pessimistic fuck,"

Purpled is taken back. So is Dream, who snorts, stopping Sapnap from speaking further. "That's enough, Sapnap." He then turns to Purpled. "There are more details we will discuss later. Of course, it doesn't sound like a full-proof plan but we have Sapnap, Tommy, and myself. We also have you now."

Purpled blinks, startled by the (somewhat) compliment.

"We'll collect here at midnight," Antfrost announces. "I doubt we all have to go, though. I guess it should be me, Dream and Sapnap."

"Hey!" Purpled stands. "C'mon, Antfrost."

"You're already pushing it, kid."

"Fuck off," Purpled snaps. "I haven't met Philza yet, and plus, he might be more persuaded with another agent from our side."

"I'm going too," Tommy says and Sapnap says, "shut up, Tommy."

"Shut up, Sapnap," Tommy snaps back.

"You don't have to go, you're not in the state to, anyway." He silently mentions his drowsiness.

"I'm awake," He stifles in a yawn.

"You shouldn't go, Tommy," Dream *agrees* with Sapnap and Tommy refuses to let them both vote against him going. The truth is that Tommy doesn't care about going to negotiations. But a part of him wants to see Wilbur again. A part of him wants to talk to Tubbo and know if Philza hates him or not.

This is why he says, "Well Philza's my father," leaving the room silent. "So, if anyone goes, it should be me." It may be the first time that Tommy registers the words aloud. That he is Philza's

son once.

Dream's face changes. Tommy knows the words can convince him over anyone. "Fine, you can come."

"Thanks for asking the rest of us," Sapnap says sarcastically and Tommy smirks in his direction. Sapnap scowls and turns to Karl who is standing beside him. Sapnap's voice may turn a little lighter when he speaks to his boyfriend, but no one mentions it. "You can hold down the fort right?"

"Yeah," Karl agrees. "I need to do a couple of things anyway."

Sapnap raises an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Okay!" Purpled stands before they can start flirting. "Are we free to leave, Antfrost?"

"You're not going back to Punz's apartment," Antfrost says before Purpled can stroll out of the office. "He usually locks up before he goes on missions and takes the key with him."

"I need my beauty sleep," Purpled says and then chuckles at Tommy. "I'm clearly not the only one though."

Tommy flips him off again, this time with both hands.

"You can sleep at mine; I have an extra room."

Purpled resigns and Antfrost leads with him on the way out. They will meet at thirty minutes to midnight. Then they will go to Philza and sort everything out.

"C'mon," Dream comes over to Tommy, and rubs his shoulder. "Before you fall asleep on the couch and we have to carry you to the elevator."

"I'm fine," Tommy lies as he feels the medication inside of him. Fatigue is a constant in his life nowadays, but he is so close to dreamland, that he might be there soon. Tommy enjoys not dreaming. He will enter dreamland but will be met by darkness. No blood, no past, and no memories.

(No young boy on the bed by his. No testing rooms. No questions about why he is and why he is so familiar.)

They get back to the apartment, although Tommy doesn't remember the journey the way there. He collapses on the bed, pulling off his shoes before he does. The last thing he hears is Sapnap's bedroom door closing, and his bedroom door open.

It can only be one other person. "Dream?" he murmurs.

"Go to sleep kid," the older whispers and Tommy falls asleep, knowing that his older brother sits by his bed, on the floor, and knowing that he is safe. Sleep comes fast enough.

He lays on the white beds and sometimes forgets how he gets there.

When he remembers, they drug him again.

Sometimes he feels his skin open, and the tubes spin through him. He doesn't struggle though, as the last time he does this, he does not wake up for a long time.

The boy thinks he is alone for a long time. One day, his bed is moved to a larger room. He turns his head and blinks three times to adjust to the harsh light.

Next to him, lies a boy he sees sometimes. He is too tired to match a name to a face. But he is sure he is two years younger, and their fourth. He is the Graduate's fourth, and he still rests next to him with tubes and machines and the same straight scars that he has.

He is nothing, and the boy, *Sixteen* is everything.

The boy does not understand.

Although, when he finally wakes up again, he forgets.

Chapter End Notes

really tried to get this one out quickly!

wow progression in this story?

philza and george next chapter! and a twist you might have not seen coming but you probably have haha

also i said there's going to be a reunion in this chapter between 2 characters. i lied. its next chapter (ill give you a clue, george finally meets someone...)

thank u for reading! (unedited)

Betray

Chapter Summary

“You had cake for breakfast, I’m not buying you more sugar,” Tommy frowns and Dream opens his eyes. “You’ll be awake all night otherwise, you won’t leave me alone.”

“I think you should appreciate my company,” Tommy scowls. “George did.”

“George tolerated you. He didn’t have to witness you high on sugar.”

“Sugar isn’t the only thing I can get high on.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy dreams again.

He is Theseus again and the boy whispers to him this time.

“Theseus,” they know his name. *“Or should I call you Sixteen?”*

He is too tired to respond. He falls asleep, and when his eyes open again, the boy is gone. Theseus wonders if he is but a dream, or if he is truly real. He doesn’t ask the white-coated people who stroll in after he is conscious. They perform tests and connect him to more wires and tubes. They are quiet and only whisper to one another.

At some point, his whole body shakes. It hurts and the pain is unbearable.

He remembers not leaving bed for days. He remembers seeing Dream again when he does. Dream asks where he has gone and why he is so tired now.

(He cannot answer him.)

Although the testing discontinues at some point in time, the tiredness does not. Not when they escape, not even when Dream and Tommy settle someplace else. The tiredness looms over him and settles deep within his bones until all he feels is a numb pain.

He wakes up in a sweat. He is disorientated, and his mouth is dry.

Tommy exhales and shuffles his body upwards, as his back leans on the wall behind him. He inhales and exhales again. He repeats the action thrive more, when Dream makes his entrance into the room, with a bottle of water.

“Hey,” his voice is calm. “Did you just wake up?”

“Yeah,” Tommy nods, and his voice doesn’t sound like his own. “I’m tired.”

“I gave a pill, that’s probably why,” Dream chuckles lightly, although Tommy knows that it isn’t the reason why he feels this strange. “I don’t think you should take anymore; you don’t react well to them. I regret giving you one before.”

“They’re meant to make me stop dreaming.”

Dream blinks. “Did you have a dream?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. Dream watches him for a moment longer, before unscrewing the cap of the bottle and passing it to him.

“You’re an idiot,” Tommy says between swallows. “You know that it took me ages to feel normal last time I took that shit.”

“You weren’t going to get any sleep,”

“Idiot,” Tommy responds, and Dream rolls his eyes.

“You needed the sleep. I’d prefer if you overslept rather than if you didn’t sleep at all, kid.”

“I’d prefer otherwise,” Tommy passes the bottle back. When he blinks, he sees the face. The boy’s face is pale, but Tommy cannot imagine his eyes. He is faceless in his mind, and his words are ice and Tommy wishes he could just forget. The Academy does this to him. They make him forget and remember when he does not want to. The memories of the testing and laboratory come back to him slowly every day, and Tommy wonders what he must do to make it all go away.

“What’s the time?” Tommy then asks, clueless. He does not enjoy feeling so.

“Eleven. We have thirty minutes before we’re meeting the others to go to Phil’s.” Dream nudges him. “Do you want to hang out in the living room with Sapnap and I?”

“If you insist.” Tommy is uneasy on his feet. The pill wears off but he feels better. He keeps his eyes open; he makes sure he doesn’t close them.

Sapnap lies on the floor by the couch, scrolling through his phone. Dream kicks his shoulder, and Sapnap scowls. “We have a couch, dude.”

“The floor’s more comfortable,” Dream rolls his eyes, stepping around him. Tommy joins him, sitting next to him. They turn on the television, but Sapnap complains because he cannot hear the video playing on his phone.

“Leave the room,”

“I was here first,” Sapnap complains. Tommy yawns and Sapnap’s eyes turn to him. “Are you still sleepy?”

Tommy’s mind is foggy, and his joints feel sore. But he isn’t sleepy, he’s just tired. “No,” Tommy denies. “Turn the TV on Dream.”

“No,” Sapnap denies.

Dream sighs. “You guys decide, I’m grabbing food.” Dream leaves the remote on the couch, and Sapnap jumps toward it. Tommy is closer, but Sapnap is fast and pushes the younger boy to the side.

Tommy doesn’t really care, he doesn’t think that he will have enough concentration to watch a program, but he does not like losing to Sapnap and fights him for the remote. Sapnap grabs the remote, and Tommy shoves him. They fall to the floor, and Tommy attempts to pry his arms open, shoving his head onto the ground until the older is kissing the floor. Sapnap manages to flip him over, kneeling on his back as he pins him down.

“You won’t win,” Sapnap says before Tommy hears Dream’s footsteps return to the room, stopping abruptly. He is then pulling Sapnap upwards, gripping the back of his shirt.

“He’s tired, Sapnap,” Dream complains.

“You don’t need to defend me,” Tommy grunts, standing up. He dusts the front of his shirt. “I almost had him.”

“Sure,” both his brother smirk at the same time. Tommy glowers, but he notices how the fatigue has left his body as his energy has returned when he attempted to fight Sapnap back. The brothers sit back down on the couch, and Sapnap’s phone is in his pocket, so Tommy assumes he has given up and will watch something with them. Dream has not brought a sweet snack, as he still insists on healthier diets during their training sessions, so they snack on dry and salty crackers.

Dream puts on a comedy for the thirty minutes that they wait. Sapnap laughs at all the jokes and Tommy feels like he’s home. The scene may not be perfect. George will never be with them, and they still have a lot in front of them, but Tommy is content with what he has now. He has his brothers, Sapnap and Dream by his side. They are a family and Tommy cannot imagine anything else.

(Pictures of Philza and Wilbur and Technoblade enter his mind. He forces himself to forget again.)

Eventually, they must turn the television off and go to Quackity’s office. Dream gives him another rundown, as the last time the conversation occurred, Tommy was half unconscious and close to sleep. Antfrost and Purpled will also go with them, it is decided. They will tell Philza that they are leaving Quackity and will join their alliance this time.

In all honesty, Tommy is nervous about seeing Philza again. The last time he sees him, he is Tommy and not Theseus any longer, and Wilbur is a different story. But Dream reassures him that no speaking is needed, however, his presence there would be helpful.

Antfrost waits on the couch in the office. Purpled sits on the other side of the couch. He looks up. “You guys are late.”

Dream checks his watch. He is never late. “Right on time actually.”

“Let’s go then,” Antfrost stands. “You don’t need your masks, do you?”

The brothers exchange glances. “No,” Sapnap ends up saying, speaking for all of them – particularly Theseus who would keep his identity hidden by a thin mask. “We don’t.”

They take two cars to Philza’s. The drive is long and slow, and Theseus may or may not fall asleep again. When his eyes open, he sees familiar black buildings and guards in familiar suits who lead

them into the underground parking.

They take the elevator, packed against each other with another of Philza's agents with them. Dream whispers in his ear, "Tell me when you want to leave, and we will."

"I'm not weak," Tommy whispers back. Dream ruffles his hair, and the conversation is over. The elevator doors open, and Tommy thinks he could navigate through the hallways with his eyes closed, even now. He was here for a long time and woke up to see the familiar walls every morning. He did not leave his room often, but when he did, he was mapping out every inch of the agency in his mind.

They do not go to Philza's office this time, instead, lead to a meeting room. Tommy walks between his brothers, and Purpled stands by him. His eyes glance around the room, and Tommy can see the gears in his mind turn as he analyses every inch of the room. He will find exits first, and possible avenues of escape. He will look for threats and strengths of his opponents as he walks.

Tommy remembers the overwhelmingness; the feeling of moving from a secured environment for so long, back into the ungarded territory. He remembers feeling so on edge and decides to help Purpled out. "There is a flight of stairs in the room by the elevator, the other only way out of this floor. This hallway leads to other empty rooms, and the floor above us is Philza's office."

Purpled nods his head at the information, and Tommy continues with details. "We'll likely meet two others when we're inside the room. The tall one with brown hair won't be armed and isn't an agent. The one with pink hair and a bitchy face is and will probably have weapons on him."

Then Purpled says, "Your brothers," and Tommy does not say anything else. The agents do not walk into the room, and rather hold the door out for them. Antfrost nods his head and thanks them before walking in, while Tommy's brothers charge into the room, Purpled and him right behind them.

The first-person Tommy sees is Philza. He is then met by the eyes of Technoblade and Wilbur.

"Philza," Antfrost greets. "Thank you for finding the time,"

Philza nods, but he does not share the thankfulness in Antfrost's tone. Rather, he stands still and weary. "Please sit down, Antfrost," Philza says. "And the rest."

Antfrost sits down in the middle, Purpled on the left of him. Tommy notices how there are two empty seats on the other side of Antfrost, or next to Purpled. He sits next to the purpled-eyed boy this once and avoids the eyes of his brothers who seem against the seating choice. (Sapnap and Dream he intends to mean – although Technoblade and Wilbur share a similar expression as they are seated.)

"I haven't heard from you in a while," Philza begins by saying, and Tommy wonders if the words are directed at him. His inner assassin listens intently and observes every movement and sound. He avoids Philza's eyes and stares at the table in front of them instead.

"No need for pleasantries," Dream says, and Wilbur and Technoblade's movements are almost instant with each other. As if they planned the coordination beforehand, almost. "We know that you've decided to begin your mission to take down The Academy without assistance."

"I wouldn't say 'without assistance'," Philza shrugs. "But we have separated from Quackity's alliance."

"Assistance?" Antfrost widens his eyes. "From whom, exactly?"

“It appears that you misheard me,” Philza chuckles. “We’re not working with Quackity, meaning we aren’t working with you.”

“What Philza means is that there’s no reason to answer your questions since your betrayal,” Technoblade scoffs and Tommy notices how Dream glares and Sapnap’s eyes burn holes into him.

(He notices a lot more anger from them nowadays. They are taught against it; any emotion, yet he watches fury wrap around Dream and take control of Sapnap.)

“That’s what we wanted to discuss with you today,” Antfrost declares. “Quackity’s betrayal.”

“I’m listening.”

“We’ve decided to... how do I put this? Split from Quackity’s plan of action. We figured out his intentions weren’t as they seemed, and we’ve decided to no longer work with him.” Wilbur looks for Tommy’s eyes, Tommy can feel them search for him, for him to look back. But Tommy won’t, and looks anywhere but him, and the family in front.

“I still work under Quackity, he is still my boss,” Antfrost says. “But for this particular mission, we’ve decided that we won’t be listening to his orders.”

“You’ve come to your senses then,” Philza says. “Well, somewhat. So, you want to work with me, then? I don’t know if you expect me to meet you with open arms, because I learn from my mistakes. Unlike your boss, I know where my allies lie and when I can trust.”

Tommy decides to decipher his weird wording later as Dream then speaks. “Although you may not need our assistance at the moment, you will need us in the future. And we will admit that we need your assistance as well.”

Technoblade smirks. “That’s not enough though.”

“No, we know it isn’t,” Antfrost says. “So, we’re willing to follow your rules for the mission. We can provide resources and information and will comply with your requests... to some extent. It depends on what you’re offering.”

“You’re asking for my trust, yet you’re not willing to follow my wishes?” Philza asks. “You surely don’t think this is a joke to me. I expected more, especially from you, Dream.” He says ‘Dream’ and Tommy feels the tenseness as the words curl around them. Philza’s eyes move around the room, stopping at Tommy.

“Tommy,” Philza says and Tommy freezes.

“Yeah?” He asks.

“What are your opinions on this?” Philza leans forward, without a smirk, rather a smile, as he holds a question of what he will say.

Tommy’s eyes flicker. “Opinions on what?”

“Philza,” Dream warns.

“Relax,” Philza says. “I’m asking my son a simple question.”

Tommy swallows. He is not scared or threatened. He realizes that he must face the reality – the words – that he wishes to run away from, for so long. But Philza has said it, then and there, and the

words ring in the chamber of his mind. *Son, son, son.*

But he is a former assassin and agent before he is Philza's son. He sits stronger and his eyes flash with warning. "What are you asking Philza?" Philza notices how he accepts the challenge. In another lifetime, Tommy would not have called him Philza – in another lifetime, he would likely be sat next to Wilbur and Philza, against his brothers, Dream and Sapnap sat on the other side of the table.

"You're opinions on the situation. What do you think of Quackity?"

Tommy does not blink. "I don't know why my opinion is of any importance."

"Did you like working under him?" Philza then asks and smiles as he waits for an answer.

"I didn't work for him." Tommy sighs. "I didn't work for him."

"Do you need to ask the kid, anything?" Sapnap rolls his eyes. "We're delaying the inevitable."

Philza is not finished. He turns to Purpled next. "I don't think I've been introduced to you unless you were wearing a mask the last time, I saw you." Tommy wonders if Philza targets his previous secret. "Your name?"

"Purpled," he says.

"Punz's brother. You were previously from The Academy."

Purpled shrugs his shoulders. "Sure."

Philza leans forward. "What are your thoughts on Quackity, then?"

"Shit person," Tommy holds a snort. "But I don't hate him."

"Your brother works for him. Do you?"

Purpled exhales, loudly. "No, I don't."

"Why's that, Purpled? You seem like a strong agent; a strong fighter. Why didn't Quackity want to work with you?"

Punz shrugs. "Punz stopped him, I guess. Punz didn't tell anyone of me for a while." As former assassins, they are taught to never reveal too much information. Tommy assumes that Purpled hands Philza this knowledge because it is the knowledge that doesn't matter – insignificant even.

"Why do you think Punz didn't tell Quackity?" Philza asks, and Sapnap mutters *'for fucks sake'* under his breath. Technoblade hears and glares at him.

"I don't know, I don't care either."

"I'll answer that for you then," Philza states. "Because Quackity would want to adopt you into his forces and utilize your talent. He would have used you from a very young age Purpled and would have made good use of you. It's what he'll do to the others – those just like you if we don't stop him."

"With all due respect, Philza," Dream says. "We already know this."

"I'm clearing up any doubts," The man shrugs. "And make sure you know that I'll acknowledge

your attempts to leave his mission, to join my side. However, you're so willing to accept his nature, yet you'll reside by his side once the mission commences. This is what I don't understand."

"Why did we bother coming?" Sapnap mutters lightly.

"Quackity's bad, but you're no better," Purpled says before Antfrost whispers in his ear, to be quiet.

Philza ends up laughing at his comment.

"Very well then," Philza says. "Very well."

"So?" Dream pushes. "Do you accept?"

"We accept on the terms that you'll comply with our standards, and in exchange, we'll finish The Academy and make sure it does not stand for a day longer." Philza pauses, and his voice turns quieter. "And we'll make sure the same thing doesn't happen to children in the future, that no more parents are ripped away from their kids. We'll keep them safe, and make sure people alike Quackity do not hurt them."

Tommy listens to the conversation intently, but at Philza's deepened words, he decides that maybe, he should not. Philza sounds vulnerable, but he covers it up quickly.

"We have a week before we relocate. I hope you're willing to comply with my standards, otherwise, the deal is off."

"We'll hear them, then," Antfrost leans forward to shake his hand. "Otherwise we're out."

"Very well then." Philza says and stands. Dream, Sapnap and Antfrost stand too. Tommy and Purpled after them. They shake hands, Dream with Technoblade, and Wilbur with Sapnap. They are then told of Philza's expectations. There are three.

"We want your temporary residence here, at The Syndicate. We have guest rooms or more personalized rooms for some of you." Tommy looks away again. He cannot help it when so many phrases are targeted at him. "We also require you to be attended by another one of my agents at all times, as a precaution." Philza then says. "And we will be moving in a week, to a safe house, before the mission commences. Our agents will relocate after us, we require all your agents to participate in this mission."

They agree with the standards. Tommy thinks they are acceptable.

Before they leave the room and n back to *Las Nevadas*, where they will gather and decide what Philza's alliance truly means, Tommy is met by the words he truly dreads.

"Tommy," the word isn't spoken by Philza, nor by Wilbur.

Rather, Technoblade.

"Tommy," he repeats. "Can we speak?"

They stand in two rows. There are ten of them.

A man walks by the Headmaster. They stand at each student, and the man takes out a needle. He has circular glasses, and his face is familiar.

Eight's eyes remain straight. He may be a Graduate, but he has not earned that honor. Not yet. He has passed Graduation and was at the top of his classes, but he is not different from the other nine agents that stand by him. He is only another agent to them, who will be killed later than sooner.

The Headmaster and the man stop in front of him. The Headmaster surveys his eyes and Eight raises his arm. It is gripped tightly and turned. A needle is pressed against his skin and a device is injected into his skin. The blood that remains is wiped, and he does not flinch as the harsh fingers leave a red mark.

"Three weeks," They are told. "Three weeks and you are dead."

Three weeks is not a lot of time when they are working to find one of the highest-performing agents. The Academy has ever had. But it is all the time they are given, as each agent is allocated an area. They are given basic weapons and nothing else to their name.

He begins his journey with lost hope. The hope soon vanishes, and Eight is left with nothing.

He is once naïve, like the rest of them. They say that when you enter The Academy, you are an assassin, no longer a boy. But Eight knows very well that every ten-year-old that arrives clings onto a string of hope, as it is all they have left. They learn over time, as Eight did himself, that the strand was never there, to begin with.

Although somehow, he finds George. Graduate Two.

And somehow, Eight survives.

It is three days before the poison will kill him inside when he finds the agent. In a hotel room, Eight not-so-successful attempts to injure him. He is only Eight and George is George.

George wins. They both survive,

Eight does not know what he expects of George. Although, he definitely does not expect George to act so calm. To be so nonchalant and take out his device. To flee with him and forget why he is there in the first place.

He takes that ounce of trust, and he runs with it. Eight will alert The Academy of George's location. Eight will be free.

(Eight does not know how freedom tastes. He hopes it tastes of happiness.)

"What's with you?"

Eight snaps his head to the left. George stares at him oddly. He must have zoned out.

"Nothing," Eight says curtly. George shrugs his shoulder and finishes his breakfast. They park in the car park of a fast-food place, and George buys them both egg muffins. Eight does not understand why he does it, but he does, and he won't complain. He only tries English muffins for

the first time the other day. He won't say he dislikes them.

Eight returns to thinking. For the last couple of nights, he contemplates alerting The Academy. But George is always around, watching and lurking. He is by his side, and Eight almost grows sick of the company. Although, it may be his fault for agreeing to whatever plan the man has anyway.

He also finds himself hesitant due to his breached protocols. He takes the device out and does not alert them daily of his whereabouts. They likely presume him dead, and if he were to bring George in, then Eight cannot guarantee his own freedom.

So, he must remain with George until he figures something out. Eight is usually a fast thinker but cannot figure out a possibility where he leaves alive.

"We'll arrive tomorrow," informs George. "Then our sleeping arrangements won't be so rushed."

Eight has his first time alone in the motel they sleep at. It is his first time truly alone, in a long time. He spends his time staring at the ceiling with wonder about what freedom will feel like. They never have the ability to even bear the thought of freeness at The Academy. But for once, the feeling feels so close to Eight. He can almost touch it.

"We will be training with them for the next couple of weeks," George states. "I do not trust them, and I don't expect you to. But there are people there that have enough to help us."

"What?" What couple possibly help them, Eight thinks.

"Connections, power, status," George lists. "It's what we need now."

"Okay," Eight responds with the information. "That's fine."

"If you want to betray me," George turns to him. "I'd do it now."

Eight freezes.

"That was a joke," George deadpans and Eight deflates. He mutters something about Theseus – Eight isn't paying attention to hear him. Something about how he doesn't know how to be funny, even though Theseus tells him it is quite easy. "Unless you are planning to betray me. Then we'd have a problem, Eight."

Eight shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You froze."

Eight stops.

"You've been acting strange as well," George turns slowly, his large eyes threatening. Eight understands the difference between the Graduates then. Dream is threatening because that is his nature. People fear his loudness and his abilities. There is Sapnap, whose fiery eyes and scowls are menacing.

George is different. George does not *try* to be threatening. He just is.

So, Eight ends up responding, "If anyone is acting strange it's you," Eight says. "I notice a lot, George. I know your weaknesses and strengths. I know what you fear most."

George blinks. There is then a smile on his lips but not in his eyes. "Glad to know. Are you finished yet? We'll leave soon."

Eight nods and dusts his hands on his shirt. He won't fear George. He once does, but not again.

When they arrive at the next city, the assassins step out of the car.

"We're here," George declares but Eight knows that already. They stand on a busy street as people fly past. People with phones pressed up against their ears, and thick coats, and long scarves. It is Winter and it snows.

Eight does not see snow until a couple of days ago. He has seen snow; he has never seen it before.

(Whiteness falls from the sky. Eight's eyes glimmer as he watches.)

They search the city. George looks for something.

When George is not looking, Eight sinks into the shadows. It is all decided on the spot, the plan is to alert The Academy. He finds an empty telephone box, and his fingers do not slip as he pressed in the memorized numbers.

The words that come out are automated. Eight presses the numbers he is taught before a voice echoes through his ears.

"*Number,*" the voice says.

"Eight. Graduate."

The phone clicks and he is met by a darker voice.

"I am Number Eight, and on a mission to find Graduate Two. I have located him."

The voice picks up. "*Why is it that, you inform us now? The mission ended weeks ago.*"

"Eight removed the device from me. I'll send the location now."

"*Your location is being tracked as we speak, Eight,*" the voice says. "*Well done, the Headmaster will be pleased.*"

"What do I do now?" Eight asks.

"*I'm being sent instructions as we speak.*" The voice is silent for a second. "*Stick with Graduate Two. Assistance will be with you shortly.*"

"Thanks," Eight exhales.

"*The Headmaster wishes me to pass on a message,*" they then say. "*He tells me that your freedom is not guaranteed, nothing is. You breached protocol and have not been alerting back, as standards require.*"

You are worthless, words ring in the depths of his mind. *You are nothing, Eight. You are like the rest of them.*

You may survive but you will be dead soon enough anyway.

"Thanks," Eight responds emotionlessly and waits for the man on the other side of the line to hang up.

He finds George an hour later. He does not seem too frantic about his disappearance, although

slightly startled.

“Where did you go?” It is a big city, thousands surround them.

“I got lost.”

George does not believe him. It is a shit excuse, Eight could have thought of a better one. “Just stay close. They’re coming to get us now.”

“Who?” Eight blinks.

“Willow College,” George says. “Or Willow Academy. We’re here, Eight. They’ve found us. Or I guess we’ve found them.”

Tommy turns sixteen

It is the day of what would be, his Graduation. Six years since he was born an assassin, six years since he arrived at The Academy.

He thinks of his other siblings, standing in rows with the Headmaster by them. They will stare forward as an old camera takes a dead photo of their faces to hang on his office wall. They will officially be Graduates then, and they will hold their titles on their sleeves with honor.

Tommy will never hold that honor. He will never know if he passes the final examination in the first place.

Sometimes, he will lie awake and ask Dream, who lies on the floor by his bed. Dream responds by rolling his eyes and always tells him to go to sleep. Under his breath, he says that there is no doubt he would have.

After Tommy asks Dream this question, he follows it up with another. It regards Dream’s final examination, although other times he will ask about Sapnap and George’s. But Dream’s is more interesting, as he lived through the experience, and Sapnap and George can only tell their own stories properly themselves because they lived through it.

Dream’s stories are calm and quiet. His voice is soft, and Tommy may fall asleep to the narratives of his experiences.

(Engulfed by snowstorms, they cling to coldness and bear through the harsh Winter. Fourteen survives with iced fingers and cold palms.)

On the sunrise of his sixteenth, Dream barges into his room. Although sunlight has not yet peaked through the cracks of the window curtains, Dream opens the curtains for the sun to be seen, rising from the stretching horizon.

“You’re sixteen,” Is the first thing Dream says. Tommy rubs his eyes and stares at him oddly.

“What?” Tommy pretends he forgets, although this remains a falsehood as he has the date locked in his mental calendar. He begins counting down towards the date the night he turns fifteen.

“You’re sixteen,” Dream repeats. His hair is combed, and he is changed into his attire of jeans and a black hoodie. Tommy suspects he has been awake for some time now. Dream almost smiles. Tommy must adjust to him showing emotion nowadays. It is strange and at first, Tommy doesn’t like it. He admits that to Dream’s face once.

(“Stop doing that,”

Dream blinks. “What?”

“That thing with your face,” Tommy frowns. “It looks weird on you.”)

“Thanks,” Tommy responds, and yawns. He waits for words, but when Dream doesn’t say anything, he asks, “What?”

“Get up,” Dream says. “We’ll be ordinary people today and celebrate.”

Tommy does not particularly enjoy the thought of celebration. He is not accustomed to it. He does not want to pretend they live a life that they do not, Tommy is perfectly content with training all day instead of what Dream has planned.

“You’re twenty-two,” Tommy responds. “Today.”

They do not know the day of their birth. They are not told. So, it is accustomed to them that they turn a year older on the first day of the second month of the year. The second of February is when the ones become twos, and the twos become threes. It is the day that the fifteen-year-olds participate in their Graduation – the ones left anyway.

Their final exam begins a few months prior, and the faster agents who complete the mission swiftly return as sixteen-year old’s, to start their new lifestyles as Graduates.

“Twenty-two isn’t special,” Is Dream’s response. “But sixteen is.”

They know sixteen is special, all for the wrong reasons. If they never left The Academy Tommy would be Theseus, and there is a chance he would be on that stage. (There also may be a chance he isn’t.) Dream would join him for photos, as the current Graduates would do. They would stand in rows and the moment would have been captured in time forever.

“That came out wrong,” Dream sighs. “But you know what I mean.”

“I don’t, actually,” Tommy yawns again.

“Get up,” Dream repeats. “I have a surprise.”

Tommy doesn’t exactly like surprises as the last time he is met by one, there is a knife to his throat and his blood on the blade. But he trusts Dream and slowly stands. Dream does not have any form of patience this morning, however, as he grips Tommy’s shoulders and steers him towards the living room from behind him. He then shoves the boy into the kitchen, where a cake sits on a white plate.

“You bought me a cake?” Tommy blinks. “Thanks?”

“I *baked* you a cake,” Dream corrects him.

“Why did you get me a cake?” Tommy asks, watching the food in question.

Dream exhales. “I forgot you’re an idiot.” Tommy shouts ‘hey!’ to that statement. “It’s what people do on their birthdays. Uh, you bake them a cake.”

“Why?” Tommy blinks.

“It’s a form of a celebration,” Dream knocks his head. “Did they not teach you anything there?” It’s a joke they make now that they have truly left.

Although Dream does know that Tommy is unaware of the celebration, as agents are simply told of celebrations and happy experiences – they never live to see it. (Maybe they do, in their previous lives. But not now.) They are led to believe the world is cruel and they are crueler.

“I don’t understand,” Tommy deadpans.

“You don’t have to understand,” Dream moves over to the other side of the kitchen. Tommy’s eyes follow his movements as he trained to do.

“Thanks, I guess,” Tommy swallows. “What flavor?”

“Chocolate and vanilla I think.”

“Cake for breakfast,” Tommy nods his head. “Sick.”

Dream returns with two candles. “We don’t have enough candles,” At Tommy’s confused glance, he explains. “You blow out candles. You make a wish.”

“This is stupid.”

Dream sighs. “That’s fine, I’m not getting the lighter out anyway. I just wanted to explain,” Dream tells him. “So, you understand.”

“Why not, bitch?” Tommy pesters. “Light them up, it’s my birthday.”

“There are two people I don’t trust near fire,” Dream denies his request. “One of those people is Sapnap. The other is you.”

Tommy flips him off. Dream cuts the cake, and Tommy jumps on the benchtop to take a bite of his slice.

“This is not chocolate,” Tommy scowls.

“I put chocolate in it.”

“You can’t bake for shit.”

They leave the house an hour later. It is early Spring, warmer, and crisp. The air is cleaner, and they no longer need to wear the dark red scarves they stole from The Academy. Their clothes are old, Dream promises they will buy more when they settle somewhere else.

Time will tell when they find a residence. Nowadays, Dream spends his nights driving and Tommy spends his mornings adjusting to a new view outside his bedroom window. They will stay at the current apartment for a few more days until they must move again. Tommy wonders if Dream’s only reason for staying at this place longer than the rest was due to it being his sixteenth.

The thought is silly, however. His sixteenth is not important, it is insignificant and meaningless. It is another birthday and does not mean a thing since he has left.

Tommy turns to Dream. Dream's eyes are closed, although his senses are high. His hands are buried in the pockets of his hoodie, and his steps are slow. He takes in the atmosphere for what it is, and he takes a deep exhale. He does not need to open his eyes to know Tommy stares at him. "Hm?"

"I'm hungry,"

"You had cake for breakfast, I'm not buying you more sugar," Tommy frowns and Dream opens his eyes. "You'll be awake all night otherwise, you won't leave me alone."

"I think you should appreciate my company," Tommy scowls. "George did."

"George tolerated you. He didn't have to witness you high on sugar."

"Sugar isn't the only thing I can get high on."

Dream rolls his eyes. *Not this again*, he is likely thinking.

"Weed, cocaine," Tommy lists. "Hard drugs."

"Don't joke about this in public."

"Who said I was joking?"

They walk for longer, before returning to their apartment. It is not safe to stay out for long, not when there are people on their backs and danger is around each corner. Dream attempts to minimize their time outside every day, but Tommy doesn't mind entirely. They train for the rest of the day through simple weight exercises. They also spar. Dream wins.

At night, Dream asks Tommy, "Where do you want to go?"

Tommy, half yawning, half asleep, responds, "What?" His voice is stifled, and his eyelids slowly droop.

"If we could go anywhere," Dream asks him. "Where do you want to go?"

"The beach," Tommy says after hesitation. He is awake enough to notice Dream freeze.

(Tommy wants to sit on the sand and watch the sky. He wishes to forget, between the small white stones and blue sky. Tommy wants to sink with the waves and see the rising sunset and finally feel. The water will swallow him whole, and Tommy will then rise.)

"We'll stay away from the water for a bit," Dream chuckles. If Tommy were more awake, maybe he'd realize Dream's words. Maybe he'd realize there is a reason Dream lives by tall buildings, away from the vision of the water and distant horizon.

(Perhaps it is a mystery; the unknown, that Dream fears. Or perhaps it is the water.)

"Go to sleep," Dream tells him. "I'll be awake." It's a reminder, maybe more to himself, as Tommy enters dreamland.

He asks if he will survive.

Dream watches him with wonder.

“Do you think so?” Tommy asks. “That I would have survived the final examination?”

Dream nods his head and shoves his shoulder. “Don’t doubt yourself.”

“Then why couldn’t you trust me?” Tommy does not say, the unspoken words left lingering on his tongue. *“Why couldn’t we leave after the mission? Why couldn’t you have enough faith in me to complete the mission, like you, and, Sapnap, and George had?”*

Why could I never be your fourth? Tommy asks in his sleep.

And Dream may or may not one day respond, “Because you will never be sixteen Tommy if we hadn’t left. If we stayed, you would not live long enough to reach your final examination.”

Because you are our last test, Dream responds, awake. *You were going to be our last test, and you could not survive.*

Dream smiles on the sunset of Tommy's sixteenth.

His younger brother is asleep and they must leave tomorrow afternoon. Danger still lurks, but they both survive.

Tommy lives past his sixteenth birthday.

The Academy is wrong. Tommy survives.

(Dream exhales.)

Chapter End Notes

200k words lets goooo (about time)

you guys give me: 1 month+

i give you: long chapter

hopefully worth the wait then? a lot of george and eight action next chapter. the time the next chapter comes, dream will have face revealed, i think so that's pretty cool. thanks for reading this chapter!

Proposition

Chapter Summary

Theseus' last mission is by the ocean.

Dream and George accompany him. Sappap is not selected as he remains in Germany, three weeks and two days into a longer mission.

Dream pulls on his mask and George snaps on his glasses. Theseus takes a deep breath in. He recalls the pain of survival and the need for life. He wonders if he will forget the euphoria; whether it should be described as so. Such pain and suffering yet strong urge for death and blood.

Chapter Notes

haven't updated in a while so maybe reread the last chapter to understand what's going on in this chapter :))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy hesitates.

Technoblade's arm is on his shoulder and his face is reassuring, and perhaps hopeful as well. He hopes for an answer; for Tommy to agree to speak with him privately. But Tommy cannot confidently say that he trusts Technoblade as the man has never given him a reason to.

Technoblade remains apprehensive and solemn when Tommy is Theseus and stays at the *Syndicate's* base. Tommy assumes that Technoblade waits for him to remember him, and when he is unable to, Technoblade gives up.

Technoblade's eyes are hopeful now, and Tommy realizes that he has the power to remove the glimpse in his eyes in only a matter of seconds by denying his request.

However, Dream does it for him instead. "We're leaving," he announces to Technoblade.

"We won't be long," He speaks quiet, and quick. His words may be whispers.

Dream frowns, watching Technoblade's hand that remains on Tommy's shoulder until he drops it. Dream then pats the same shoulder. "It's past his bedtime, so we have to get going."

Tommy scowls, elbowing his brother's stomach. "Shut up, man." He grumbles. "I don't have a bedtime."

"Sure, kid."

"Tommy?" Technoblade persists and Tommy looks up at him. *Yeah?* The soft words rest on his lips.

"I wanted to speak to you, I won't be long."

"Fine," Dream then says, responding for him. "Whatever you want to say, you can tell both of us."

Technoblade rolls his eyes yet continues. "I don't expect you to trust or speak to me, I get that. I know you're closer with Wilbur, and Philza will manage to speak to you."

"Huh?" Tommy asks.

"The point is that I need you, to uh, know that I'm here for you. I'm your brother, after all."

Tommy swallows. "Uh, thanks?"

"I won't force you to be anyone you're not." *Theseus*, he does not say. *I won't force you to be Theseus when you're Tommy now.*

"Did... Wilbur make you say this?"

"He, well, he encouraged me," Technoblade sighs.

Tommy nods his head. He is about to thank him, but Dream grips his shoulders tight and steers him away. "Thanks for that," but Dream's words aren't so sincere. "We'd best be off now."

"I understand," Technoblade says before they leave.

Tommy scoffs at Dream when they step into the elevator. "You're an idiot. He just wanted to speak to me."

"Nothing good happens when someone's words are, *I want to talk to you.*" Dream tells him. "Trust me."

"Well, the conversation wasn't horrible." Dream does not respond.

They return to the car park, where a car waits behind for them. Inside is seated Sapnap, as Purpled and Antfrost take another car to return to *Las Nevadas*.

"You guys took your time," Sapnap comments. "What was that about?"

"Nothing much," Dream waves his hand in the air, as if to tell Sapnap that he will tell him later. "Let's just go home."

Home. The word lingers on Tommy's mind before fatigue swallows him whole again.

When Tommy wakes up again, he almost forgets where he is for a moment. There will always be the sudden confusion lasting as his eyes open; Dream and Sapnap will experience similar instances. They will believe they are back at The Academy, after living by their previous routine for so long. However, Tommy smells the scent of food from the kitchen and Sapnap's bickering and is reminded he is not there anymore.

Tommy almost forgets the previous events of the night until he stumbles into the kitchen, realizing how their morning is accompanied by Slime, Antfrost, and Purpled. They are seated at the dining table, eating whatever Dream has made. Sapnap peels open a banana, responding to one of Purpled's comments. It is Dream who notices Tommy come in.

"Tommy," Dream greets. His green eyes watch him. "Good morning."

Tommy nods, yawning into his fist. He feels drowsy, not as awake as he should be, with such company. Dream notices. “The pills should wear off today,” he says, and Tommy realizes the reason behind his tiredness. “There’s a protein shake in the fridge if you want to wake yourself up a bit.”

Tommy nods, and there is a glass waiting for him. The taste isn’t good, nor is the smell, but he swallows it in one go as he normally does.

“What is that?” Purpled asks and Tommy remembers they are all here again. He feels eyes on his back, but the feeling is so normal now. “It looks gross.”

“You want to try?” Sapnap smirks. “I can make you one real quick.”

“I’m good, thanks,” Purpled denies, picking up his empty plate to bring it to the sink. Sapnap grabs it off him, as he lists the vegetables in the smoothie.

“Kale, pineapple, banana, I think a couple of almonds—”

“Stop,” Purpled shoves him out of the way as Sapnap blocks his entrance out of the small kitchen. “Tommy, blink twice as a cry for help.”

Tommy yawns back, “I’m fine.”

“If you say so,” Purpled leaves the room, muttering something about using the bathroom.

Tommy observes Dream’s stiff posture and Sapnap’s sudden cold stare because he turns to Antfrost and Slime, who he does not expect at this time of day. They do not usually have visitors, as it is only Karl who is the only one who comes to the apartment, usually to speak to Sapnap. Other times, he is raiding their kitchen for leftovers. However Karl isn’t present now, so Tommy remains confused.

He voices his thoughts, directly at Slime who he knows will answer his questions. “Why are you guys here?”

“Does he have memory loss?” Antfrost smirks, answering instead of Slime who remains silent.

“Fuck you,” Tommy responds. He turns to Dream. “Why are they here?”

“We were discussing a few details,” Dream tells him.

“You could have woken me up.”

“You needed the sleep.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Well? What were you discussing then?”

“We’re planning to move into the *Syndicate’s* later today.” At Dream’s words, Tommy freezes. “The agents will then be relocated after us over the next couple of days, and Philza is arranging their sleeping arrangements.”

“Can he really fit all of our agents, as well as his own, in his agency?” Tommy knows Philza’s agency is big, but not big enough to hold twice its current agents.

“According to him, he can,” Sapnap shrugs. “He mentioned having another location nearby, so that’s the answer to that, I guess.”

“Afterwards, we’ll move into a safe house closer to the new location of The Academy. Since we no longer have the advantage of extra knowledge, we’ll have to find a way to map the new grounds, in order to begin a plan of attack.”

“How are we going to do that?” Tommy asks.

“They have experts,” Dream hesitates, before adding, “Tubbo.” Tommy doesn’t remember the last time he hears that name. Maybe when he last went to speak with Niki at the bakery. (Time doesn’t feel real anymore, Tommy thinks.)

“Any more questions?” Sapnap asks, and Tommy shakes his head. They may joke about Tommy’s curiousness, but in a situation such as this, the former assassins remain sincere. Dream and Sapnap understand Tommy’s need to know all the pieces of detail in the plan and wrap his head around what will happen over the next week. It will allow him to train; to prepare mentally and physically.

“We can train for the rest of the afternoon, before we leave,” Dream states. Tommy notices how his body is tense. Sapnap notices too, because he walks up to Dream, and punches his shoulder.

“Loosen up, Dream,” Sapnap says. “It’ll be fine.”

“That’s not what I’m concerned about,” However, the man does not reiterate further.

Purpled returns from the bathroom, and forces Antfrost to go to the training grounds with him. They leave, and Tommy stands by Slime. “Are you okay, Slime?”

“I don’t like this,” Is all Slime says.

“What don’t you like?”

“Teaming with Philza from the *Syndicate*.” Slime frowns. “We are Quackity’s, not Philza’s.”

“We are no one’s.” Tommy corrects him.

“We cannot trust Philza from the *Syndicate*. We do not know him.”

Slime is true. They do not know Philza. But Philza is Tommy’s father – whatever that means anymore, and Quackity cannot be considered trustworthy either.

“We don’t know Philza, but do we know Quackity, either?” Tommy voices his thoughts.

“I don’t understand,” Slime shakes his head.

“We don’t know Quackity’s intentions, or what he’s doing, or his true plans. We don’t truly *know* him either.”

Once Slime leaves, Tommy, Sapnap, and Dream remain. Sapnap and Tommy exchange glances before they watch Dream who stares at the wall behind them, his eyes solid.

Sapnap waits a moment before he snaps his fingers in front of Dream’s face. “What’s with you? You’re never like this,”

“I’m thinking.”

“Think less then,” Tommy interrupts.

“It’s fine,” Dream sighs. “My mind is elsewhere. I’ll concentrate, I’m sorry.”

“Dream’s apologizing? What reality are we living in?”

“Shut up Sapnap,” Dream grumbles and shoves his shoulder. “Let’s go. We have a lot to do before we have to leave.”

Willow Academy remains as prestigious as it sounds. Golden walls and thick coats of white paint greet them, as well as large photos of the Headmasters before their time. They stare into souls with cold eyes, and each painting serves as a reminder of the burden that comes along with such a role.

George glances away. (If he keeps staring, he thinks he may remain standing in the same position forever.) Eight walks behind him slowly, and nervous.

“This way,” The agent states. His voice is monotone and dull, and he directs them through the empty courtyard. “Please keep up.”

George turns to Eight again. He raises his eyebrows, noticing Eight’s slow nature. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, just observing.”

They are taken through long rooms and hallways. George remains on the lookout, analyzing every inch and corner. He remains reserved and responds politely to the questions asked by the agents who watch him carefully. Eight remains reserved as well, and George grows a sudden sensation that something feels off.

They arrive at large wooden doors with golden carvings. The agents stand outside, opening the door for them. They nod their heads, redirecting their eyes away. George glances at Eight before they walk into the office of the Head of Willow Academy.

The room is as George imagines, and similar to the Headmaster’s office. Only this one that they stand in is smaller. There are more paintings and color present. What surprises George, is that he does not fear.

He expects to. He thinks about this situation when he lies awake. Of asking the Head of Willow Academy to save them. To help them take down The Academy and set the children free. He thinks of the conversation and his exact words a million times in his head. When he hesitates or does not know what to say, he replays the conversation until it is perfect.

It has to be perfect; George knows.

“George,” The Head greets. The Willow Academy’s Head is young. She is the first Head that breaks down the generation of male Headmasters.

George watches her. He wonders if she is younger than him.

Her eyes reach Eight. “And you are?”

“F—”

“You can call him Eight,” George interrupts. “We don’t have time for pleasantries, however.”

“I see then,” The Head chuckles lightly. “Well George, I’ve received your messages. It’s not an easy ask, wanting to take down one of the biggest agencies in the country.”

One of the biggest in the world, George could argue.

“And I can’t guarantee anything,” The Head tells him. “We have a strong connection to them, you must know. I can’t ruin such a bond just because one of their Graduates has asked.” Her words are condensing, sarcastic as George notices.

“I know,” George responds. “I know that.”

“It’s not that easy,” she says. “It’s not that easy at all.”

“I know it won’t be easy,” George accepts. “But I know you want power, and The Academy stops your agency from reaching the potential that it holds.”

The Head’s smile slips into a frown. She does not mutter a word.

“With The Academy gone, Willow Academy may reign as one of the most powerful agencies.”

“It’s not that easy,” The Head says again, louder.

“I know it isn’t, so I have a proposition.” George glances at Eight who stands behind him, still with wide eyes.

The Head nods her head, her eyes sweeping over the room before they narrow back at him. “I’m listening.”

“If you agree to help me, and my friend over here—” George nod his head at Eight. “—take down the Academy, I’ll join yours.”

“Pardon me?”

“I will work under you,” George agrees. “For a year.”

“A year,” The Head suddenly smirks. “I thought you were intelligent. A year will not suffice for a commitment like this.”

“Three years,” George bargains.

“Ten,” The Head states, “And I will not go any lower.”

“George,” Eight suddenly murmurs. “You’re not doing this.”

“If it guarantees that you will train your agents to the highest standard you possibly can and you successfully take them down,” George nods slowly. “Then fine. However, if you are unable to, then consider me dismissed.”

“Oh, trust me, George,” The Head says, “This has been a plan of action of mine for a while, but I’ve never had a distinct motive to carry any plan forward. However, although my preparation will exceed any other agency, that does not guarantee success. I’ll put all my agents forward, but this may cost me – there is a possibility we do not succeed. And considering all factors, success may

not be in our favor.”

“You will try,” George persists. “And put everything forward.”

The Head sighs. “I will.” She raises an eyebrow. “But I don’t think you understand this situation and all factors either, Graduate Two.”

George blinks, speechless. He turns to Eight who does not say anything either. The Head should not refer to him as *Graduate Two*, she should know of this name for him in the first place.

“Did you know George,” The Head begins by saying, “that The Academy is an organization run by the government?”

It has been exactly five hours and thirty-six minutes since they arrived at the *Syndicate*.

Tommy spends those five hours and thirty-six minutes training.

(Their arrival is slow and awkward. Philza tells Tommy that his room will remain the same as his previous stay. His brothers’ room is located away, in another building with the other agents. Antfrost, Karl, and Purpled remain on a separate floor as them.)

Tommy’s stomach growls, yet his hunger is ignored as he throws his knives at three targets, quickly turning and swiping the weapons from his belt. He kicks the dummy into the corner of the room and shoves a blade into its arm.

He hesitates to wipe the sweat that gathers on his forehead before he continues. His training is intense, and he does not allow himself to take breaks.

(It is a reminder of his previous life, of training. He stops when he collapses, or until the rest of his classmates do.)

Only this time, he is alone. The room is empty and he does not hold back, throwing his blades into targets and swiping daggers and knives off the tables to plunge them into the dummies.

He is focused. He is stealthy and precise. The Academy’s teachings ring in his mind and he can faintly recall the blood, sweat, and tears of his previous lifestyle. He can almost taste it and see it. A life when Tommy is Theseus but goes by Sixteen. He is fifteen years old and fights to survive.

Eventually, Tommy collapses.

He doesn’t exactly collapse, however. Instead, he is running through an obstacle course, and his leg gets caught between two steps, and his body flies forward. He rolls, clenching his stomach in pain. When nausea passes, he does not get up. Instead, he pants heavily, and his stomach rises and falls quickly, as he tries to find air.

Tommy thinks he lays down in the same position for about ten minutes. In those ten minutes, he

wonders if he will ever get up again.

But he does. For George. For himself. For Dream and Sapnap.

(He refuses to stumble during their mission. He refuses to screw up.)

“Tommy?” A voice travels through the room. Not too long ago, Tommy would have jumped up. He would have had a mask on and they would call him *Theseus*.

Now, is different. Now, he allows himself to remain vulnerable. Now, he is Tommy to them.

“Tommy?” The voice repeats until a shadow is cast above him. He shields his eyes and bites his tongue. “Are you good?”

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters.

“What are you doing?” Wilbur shares a worried expression. His clothes are casual, contrasting Tommy’s workout gear. His hair springs forward, and he has glasses on now. “Why are you on the floor?”

“Just,” Tommy thinks for a second. “Enjoying the floor’s company.”

Wilbur laughs for some reason. “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“Is the floor good company, then?”

“Not really,” The words come out, he doesn’t know why he feels so willing to speak and hold a conversation with Wilbur. Due to this, Wilbur sits down next to him, likely thinking Tommy invites him down to speak. He doesn’t.

“You’ve been here for a while. The agent that you were meant to stay with, said you ditched them.”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders and sweeps his fingers through his sweaty blond hair. His brown roots are so evident now that when he had seen himself in the mirror before they had left *Las Nevadas*, Tommy’s previous name had rested on the tip of his tongue.

“They were being a bitch.”

“You were supposed to stick with them,” Wilbur corrects him. “How’d you even remember your way around here?”

Tommy shrugs his shoulders, Wilbur likely realizes that the question isn’t that great, as it is quite obvious – the answer is that it is The Academy’s doing.

“Just stick with them, yeah?” Wilbur asks him. “They’ll wait outside, they won’t watch you train if you don’t want that.”

“No,” Tommy denies, and he finally lifts his body, so he sits down upright. Although he moves away from Wilbur, as he feels too close.

“Philza can ask someone else to,” Wilbur offers. “What about Tubbo?”

“No,” Tommy denies again, only quicker.

Wilbur raises an eyebrow. Now Tommy gets a better look at him. He looks away quickly when Wilbur's dark eyes analyze him too closely.

"Don't do that," Wilbur responds. "Don't push him away."

"I've already done that," Tommy mutters. "Can't do anything about it now." If he wasn't so tired he would have ditched Wilbur and left. That's what he tells himself, at least.

"Tubbo doesn't hate you, none of us do," Wilbur sighs. "He's been talking about you a lot, and so have Ranboo and Niki. They want to talk to you; they want you to talk to them."

"I can't say the same."

"I don't understand," Wilbur exhales. "We can go back to how it was before..." He doesn't finish his words. "We didn't get along much, did we? But we tried. And you spoke to Tubbo – why don't you want that anymore?"

Tommy glances at him for a second. He realizes that Wilbur expects an answer, a proper one. No short or clipped responses, he wants reasoning. He wants to understand. "Because I can't. Because I can't have that."

"I don't—"

"Purpled tells me to talk to you and Philza and Technoblade. And I tried, I *tried* to speak to you. But I'm not Theseus anymore and I can't be that." Tommy interrupts. "I can't be Tubbo's friend or get to know Ranboo or speak to Niki because that was me before, that's not me now."

"Tommy," Wilbur says lightly.

"I have a mission and I have to complete the mission. Whether I die, whether I survive, I have to finish it and I can't allow connections to interrupt." *I can't allow myself to care for people, when I have to prepare to be gone*, Tommy thinks.

"You're not going to die," Wilbur denies.

"I might," Tommy shrugs. "Everyone dies eventually."

"You are not going to die," Wilbur says louder.

"That's not my mission. I'm not going to try to die. I don't want to die." But he might. He's willing to sacrifice himself for Sapnap and Dream. Because one of his brothers has passed away already and he cannot let it happen again. "But it might happen and I accept it. So should you."

"I've accepted you're not my brother anymore," Wilbur snaps. "I've accepted you're not Theseus and you may never be again. But fuck, just accept that I'm trying – we're all trying to understand this new you. We don't need the old you."

"I'm an assassin. I kill. I've murdered," Tommy says and suddenly feels. "I don't think you want to know me."

"I do," Wilbur repeats. "I do."

"Tommy?" Another voice comes into the room. Tommy turns to head to Dream, who carefully walks into the training hall, his feet stopping when he sees who he is with. Dream raises his eyebrows. "Hello, Wilbur."

“Aren’t you meant to be with another agent?” Wilbur responds. “Does no one listen to Phil?” He says, quieter.

Dream hears him, even from across the room. He walks closer. “You don’t listen either, you’re meant to be in a meeting with him.”

“Oh,” Wilbur blinks. “I guess I forgot.” Tommy doesn’t think he has forgotten.

Dream turns back to Tommy. “How long have you been here?”

“A couple of hours.”

“Since we’ve arrived,” Dream corrects his vague statement. “Get up, we’re eating.”

“I still have to train,” Tommy grumbles as Dream grabs his arm and hoists him up to stand. Tommy raises his arms above his head to stretch his joints. “I’ll be done soon.”

“No,” Dream denies. “Sapnap’s in the cafeteria, and so is Karl. We’ll eat and you can come back.”

“Fine,” Tommy sighs. He turns to Wilbur. “Nice talk, Wilbur.”

“You can call me Will,” Wilbur responds, dejectedly.

“You can join us,” Dream offers, shrugging but Wilbur does not accept the request, standing and sidestepping past the two.

“I have a meeting to go to,” Wilbur nods. “Thanks though. I’ll see you later Tommy.”

Maybe one day, one day in the past or future, Tommy would have responded with, “*Bye, Will.*”

“*What?*” George snaps in response.

“The Academy is run by the government,” The Head says solemnly. “It isn’t a known fact. I only discovered the truth recently.”

“Explain,” George spits out.

“You need to calm down first,” George glares at the Head’s words, but she does continue. “They began the organization by training a couple of children who showed promising athletic and academic abilities. Once officials began growing their bases, they figured out to put the children to use and they began working for them.”

“What type of work?” Eight asks, his first question. George glances back, to send him a glance to remain silent, however, the Head responds anyway.

“Their dirty work, more on the technical side of things. However, this isn’t important.”

The Head continues. She goes on to tell them about how their operation expanded, how they figured out the power they held, to grow an organization of children to carry out their work.

It had continued until there were knives, blades, and guns.

Then the dirty work had become murder. Taking down corrupt ministers, or those who broke their trust. Anyone who would get in their way. And the operation grew. Operation Assassinate became a hoard of children which became The Academy.

“Then money had gotten involved. Politicians and people in power began bidding. Those with the highest numbers put forward hits, and The Academy complied. The money went back into the system, to develop their technology and fund the government, to deepen the pockets of the rich.”

“You’re not serious,” George does not believe her words. “There is no way you know this.”

“I am the Head of Willow Academy, there is not a lot that I do not know, George.” The Head smiles. “Graduate Two.”

The word is a trigger. It triggers him enough to listen further.

“I had thought it ended there, though. When I had found out, I assumed this was the end of it, that The Academy was infiltrated by the government. A couple of officials who had more power and money than they should have were running the agency themselves. Only, there's more.”

They sit down. On the seats in front of her, they lean forward on hard seats and wait for her words.

“It had begun when more agencies arose. I assume they assumed that their positions and power would be threatened, as more began making an appearance. They needed to reign as the highest in position, to ensure that no other academy of students could overtake their operations.”

George’s mouth goes dry. He swallows, and he knows.

“So, they commence processes, scientific experiments on the kids. They wired them to be the best, to be perfect. In order to retain their power and ensure no one else could come between themselves and their occupation, they started operations on these kids. Until they were an unstoppable force, until nothing could come between them and anything else.”

Next to him, Eight whispers harsh words under his breath, that George can't hear.

“I was told,” The Head says. “I was told there are four of you.”

“Dream, Sapnap, and you,” Eight murmurs.

“No,” George stands, slamming his hand down. He should not feel angry, he is wired not to, but now anger is all he feels now. “That isn’t possible.”

“I would not lie to you, George. You have no reason to trust me, and I have no reason to trust you. But I see the scars on your arms. I think I know, Graduate Two.”

“No,” George denies again.

“You’re perfect, to them. You are the best agent they could make. Tell me, George, how are you perfect?”

“No,” George repeats. “No.”

“Perfection is subjective, I suppose. No one can truly be perfect. But what about Sapnap? What about Dream?”

“They weren’t experimented on,” George quickly denies. “They weren’t tested on.” He knows the pain, the harsh burns, and the tests. He knows Dream and Sapnap do not go the tests because he knows how it is to be alone.

“How about Theseus?” The Head asks and turns her computer towards them. “He’s escaped your agency, and there is currently a large sum of money on him. They would not care of a simple agent if they were not valuable.”

“Not Theseus, not him,” George’s ears ring and he tells himself it all is false. Yet he is trapped in the reality that his friends go through the same trauma as him. They are prodded and poked. They are tested and experimented on until they run out of tears and cannot breathe.

George does not accept the reality that Theseus is him. Theseus goes through experiments to be perfect. And when they succeed, what is left is no longer an agent, but an agent they call their own. They stick a label on him and expect perfection. They do not allow mistakes, they despise it. The Head smiles. The smile is not soft. Because now, she knows, and they know too, that she has the upper hand. “The thing is that they do not have their perfect agent anymore. Nor do they have Theseus, and the other fellow Graduates, Sapnap and Dream.”

Not Dream. Not Sapnap and Theseus. They are safe, they are not harmed. They cannot be experiments. They cannot go through the same as him – George denies and *denies*.

“They do not have you, George. I do.” The Head smiles. “So although the odds aren’t in our favor, we have an advantage. We have a force, George. We have you.”

She may see the doubt in George’s eyes. She may foresee the chaos that has erupted, the pain and longing in his eyes.

“They will continue experiments, and more children will go through the same harm as you did. By joining me, you can prevent this. I’m afraid that if we do not act now, they will continue testing. You cannot let that happen because once it does, we lose any upper hand we have.

“Set them free, George,” The Head whispers, and her eyes bore into his own. “*Set them free.*”

“Okay,” George says slowly. “Okay,”

“Okay?” She smirks.

“I agree, I accept.”

The Head’s eyes turn to Eight. He cowers. “And you?”

George snaps his head. Eight stutters, unlike him. His eyes dart and sweat falls from his forehead. George’s eyes sweep from the long scars on his arms and return to his face. He notices the doubt and wonders if Eight will act on it. The younger boy stares at his palms, and his fingers roll into fists.

His response catches George by surprise. Or maybe it doesn’t.

(His head spins, he is lost. George does not know what to do, and how to feel.)

“I accept too,” Eight eventually says, and his voice breaks. “Count me in.”

Theseus' last mission is by the ocean.

Dream and George accompany him. Sapnap is not selected as he remains in Germany, three weeks and two days into a longer mission.

Dream pulls on his mask and George snaps on his glasses. Theseus takes a deep breath in. He recalls the pain of survival and the need for life. He wonders if he will forget the euphoria; whether it should be described as so. Such pain and suffering yet a strong urge for death and blood.

(When the mission ends, he will never experience such an instance again. Dream will make sure of it.)

Dream moves into the room first. He has a knife in each hand and throws himself onto a ship by the dock. His kills are sharp and swift. George cleans up after him, taking out the crew members by him.

Theseus slashes the letter 'A' onto their wrists and blood sweeps into the cracks of the wooden floorboards. They stain the floors, and the assassins throw the members into the ocean. If Sapnap were here, he'd use fire. However, this particular mission does not require a such flame.

Theseus watches them sink. They drown until their shadows are swallowed by lasting bubbles. They remain silent as Dream grabs the steering wheel and George unties the ropes from the dock. Then they set sail. They still have quite a mission ahead of them.

"George," Dream announces. "Check the storage area." George does not need to be asked twice.

"Dream?" Theseus queries, waiting for an order. Dream does not give him one, and Theseus moves over to stand by him.

"Our last mission," Dream says, or perhaps he doesn't. His eyes are clouded, unusual from his blank expressions. The wind is loud but their pounding heartbeats may be louder. "I didn't think I'd ever live to see the day."

Theseus wonders if Dream is joking, but Dream does not joke often so he says nothing. The older agent turns to him and offers the wheel. "I'll go down to check up on George, just keep the wheel straight and we'll be fine."

"If I turn?"

"I'll throw you off the deck."

Dream leaves and Theseus allows his fingers to wrap around the wheel, his fingers pressing against the rough surface. His hair ruffles as the wind become stronger, as the ship flies forward. Theseus exhales. Land cannot be seen as lurking waters surround them.

The plan of escape will not be executed until a few days later when it is night, and the four agents

are already with knives and gear. Although the day has not arrived, Theseus embraces the calmness and sudden loneliness, for what it is. He can count the seconds between sounds and wonders if he could sail the seas forever.

(Theseus is restricted and tied to The Academy, yet he has never felt so free.)

The feeling does not last. It never does.

A ship is seen further ahead. Theseus shouts for Dream and George.

The second part of the mission commences. They will take out the members of the ship. The ship holds weapons and riches, which are being sent to another agency. The agents are ordered to locate the shipment and send the coordinates back, intercepting the exchange. The Academy may grow stronger as other agencies will remain weak.

Theseus calls for Dream and George again, who do not come up. Theseus' shouting was not a good idea on his own half, as he gains the attention of a few of the members on board.

The young agent swears.

"Keep your distance!" A man on the opposite boat yells. "Or we'll shoot!"

Theseus prepares for blood and bullets. He charges, flicking his wrists and throwing his knives. He goes charging, knocking the boat into the opposite, before shoving himself onto the other boat. He tumbles and rolls onto the ground and hears gunshots. Gritting his teeth, Theseus stands, refusing to stay down. He stabs the man's leg as he staggers upwards, spinning around to kick his side.

The man groans, kneeling. He shoots but the bullet misses because Theseus has been an assassin for almost six years and does not make such simple mistakes.

The rest of the crew charge at him. Theseus swipes the gun from the main man, targeting the shoulder and legs of the crew that attacks him. When he runs out of bullets, he throws the metal at one of them, before taking out his knives.

Theseus remains in his element. He slashes skin and fights for his life because he refuses to die. Not yet, anyway.

The hairs at the back of his neck rise. He raises his hand behind his head and flinches when metal slices through his skin as he barely grips the knife that almost plunges through the back of his head. Turning around. Theseus notices how the man he fights previously has staggered forward, not finished with his fight.

Theseus sighs, pulling the bloody knife out of his skin. He may not be able to use his right hand, but he still remains stronger. Unless he is blind and has no working legs, then maybe the man has a chance. Theseus should not be so cocky, but it is in his nature to be.

Theseus glances at the bloody knife and smirks. Then he throws.

Theseus never misses. He aims for the man's eye, and the man falls back as the point of the blade hits exactly where he aims. He then leaps onto the man, twisting his arms back until he yelps in pain.

"The money?" He asks, pulling tighter.

"In storage,"

“Is there a code? Any lock?”

“You won’t get it out of me.”

Theseus grabs a knife discarded on the floor, so the handle faces the man’s head, instead of the blade. He uses the hard surface of the grip to knock the man’s head. He would leave the blade for a more serious occasion, but the man has suffered enough with a blind eye and broken bones. He is knocked out unconscious when Theseus is finished.

As soon as Theseus checks that the members are either dead or unconscious, he collapses onto a wall, staring at the hole in his hand, in pain. He hears a sudden noise, his assassin instinct rushing through his veins once again, yet it comes from his own ship.

It is George and Dream who rush from the storage unit downstairs, onto the deck. They push forward, stopping abruptly when they notice the situation that remains in front of them. Theseus rolls his eyes and flips them off.

The older agents remain speechless.

Theseus notices Dream’s untucked shirt and George’s messy hair. “You’ve got the be fuckin’ kidding me.” He mutters loud enough for them to hear.

“How did you...?” George stops, snapping his head to his partner. “*Dream*,” he hisses.

“It was your idea,” Dream rolls his eyes, shoving him as he jumps onto the boat. “We’ll alert the Academy. Thanks, Theseus.”

“Fuck you,”

Dream’s eyes move from the bodies to Theseus’ bloody hand. “That doesn’t look nice.”

“It doesn’t feel nice either.” His skin is torn and his arm sweats. He relies on his right hand, his better fighting side, so he is disadvantaged at the moment.

“I’ll clean it up,” Dream sighs. “Sit down, George, and I will finish up.”

“So, I was left to do the dirty work,” Theseus rolls his eyes. “Whilst you guys were... *preoccupied*.”

“We weren’t–” Both agents say at the same time, before glancing at each other’s eyes, again turning away.

George speaks louder. “Get off the boat Theseus, let me help your hand.”

They return to their small residence after the mission. Dream alerts The Academy, but they will return the following morning as helicopters will not approach at such a time. As the town is busy as there is a festival occurring, they seek to reduce suspicion and avoid any attention and will return to the agency hours after.

The agents remain in a small house by the waters. Dream stitches Theseus’ skin together and they order food. After, they take a walk back to the waters. Dream no longer has his mask on, and George has ditched his goggles. The agents walk along the roadside, kicking stones and empty soft drink cans that are littered by the ocean.

Theseus baskets the company and holds onto the warmth of the jacket that Dream forces him to

wear. He buys it in town as Theseus rests after the mission, as there are cheap deals due to the festival. Theseus turns to his brothers, watching Dream whisper in George's ear, for the man to shove his shoulder in return. When he exhales, the air glistens. He wonders how long this moment will last and if it will ever be the same again.

When they leave, he knows they will travel for a long time before the change will occur. He knows they will no longer have to survive, as they can live instead.

Dream makes him promise. A promise to survive. To live. To be free.

Theseus glances into George's eyes. "I still cannot believe you guys were making out whilst I was risking my life."

"We were not making out," George utters quickly.

"Really?" Theseus smirks. "Then explain—"

Dream covers Theseus' mouth with his cold palm. "Be quiet, kid."

"I'm not a kid," the boy responds, his voice muffled through Dream's hand. The conversation changes topics, and the agents find themselves moving toward empty fishing docks.

"Let's go on an evening swim," Theseus introduces the idea, throwing his jacket off swiftly. Dream grips his shoulder before he can jump.

"No," Dream says strictly. "It's dangerous."

"It's just water."

"You're not jumping in."

Theseus narrows his eyes. "You threatened to throw me in before."

"I was joking," Dream frowns. "Just sit down with us."

"Why can't he?" George asks. "It's harmless. The waves aren't that bad."

"He's not going into the water."

Theseus blinks at Dream's hostility. At first, he thinks it's because of his hand.

("This isn't looking good," Dream sighs, observing Theseus' injury. "It's deep,"

"I can stitch it up," Theseus offers. "If you're too scared."

Dream is never scared; Theseus is only joking. Dream flicks his cheek and takes out a needle.

Theseus is a fast healer, very fast in fact. The injury hardly hurts anymore, and blood loss does not make him as it should.

It is a benefit of The Academy; a type of immunity and healing that is gained after many exercises and dangerous activities.)

But it cannot be, as water won't hurt him. George has delicately wrapped his hand with bandages. He will be fine.

Then the idea forms in Theseus' head. "Is it because I drowned once? Because I'm not going to do that again." It may explain Dream's fear of water. Or rather, his fear of *Theseus* going into the water.

"I don't know, I don't care. You're not going in." His tone signals the end of the discussion, for no further negotiation.

Instead, they sit on the edge of the pier. There are voices far away, as well as singing and music.

"The festival was large," Dream notes. "I'm not surprised the helicopters will arrive later, there must be hundreds of people gathered."

"What's the festival for?" Theseus questions.

"I'm not sure."

"Can we check it out?"

George interrupts quickly. "It's too dangerous. We were told to remain indoors. We've broken enough rules as it is." They break the standards set, but it is rare that they'll be reprimanded.

(It doesn't matter though because they'll be gone soon. They're leaving in a couple of weeks, and they will not look back. Dream promises.)

"What will you do, George?" Theseus turns to the older assassin. "What is the first thing you'll do when we leave?"

George freezes. Theseus wonders why.

"I don't know," he whispers, turning to Dream who stares into the ocean. They are so far from life, from the dancing and ceremony and music. Yet at that moment in time, all they need is each other. "I want to see the sunset."

"What?" Theseus responds, raising both eyebrows.

"I want to experience it," George sighs. "I want to experience one when we're finally free." No one may understand such desire except him. He doesn't mind.

Dream understands though. He has a knowing look in his eyes and a light smile.

They watch the stars for a few moments longer. The dancing and music become louder. It drifts away, and there is laughter and cheering. Theseus wonders how it feels to be free. He wonders how happiness truly is and if normality can truly exist.

Theseus falls asleep under the stars. Next to his brothers. When he wakes up again, he is under his sheets, his bandaged arm feeling slightly better. He falls asleep again.

From the corner of Dream's eyes, he notices George watching him.

Theseus has fallen asleep next to them, and his arm swings off the side of the dock. Dream is paranoid. Although he does not care for the ocean, he cares about what it does to people. He remembers Theseus' drowning body and the seven slow minutes of waiting. He remembers pulling him out and waiting for the boy to breathe again.

He offers to bring Theseus back to the housing location. George asks for him to stay. Now he stares at him.

Dream pretends not to notice. But George's eyes are so luring and curious that he cannot help but turn his head and ask, "What?"

"What?" George smirks in response.

Dream rolls his eyes, pulling his arm around George as he shoves him lightly. George grabs the edge of the dock, steadying himself quickly before he falls in. "That was too close, don't do that."

Dream rolls his eyes. "I shoved you. Lightly."

"You're stupid."

"You're an idiot."

George glances at Theseus, who sleeps with his arms wrapped around his eyes, similar to a shield. "You know you can't keep him away from the water forever."

Dream mutters, "I can damn try."

"He won't drown himself," George states. "He did that because he had to. Loosen up a little next time, he'll be safe with just us."

"Well," Dream responds bitterly. "It will just be me and him."

Dream corrects George from saying '*us*' because there will not be an '*us*' for a long time. When they leave, it will only be Dream and Theseus. They will change their appearance and their names, and they will be gone.

(Theseus assumes George and Sapnap will be coming with him, but he does not know that the two agents will stay for a while longer.)

"He will be safe with you," George corrects himself. "He can protect himself as well, I won't doubt it for a second."

Theseus is strong and daring. He has made it this far for a reason. Dream may push him further than his classmates or become furious when Theseus begins slacking, but it is because Dream has seen potential in him. He had observed his classmates, yet his eyes lingered on Theseus, knowing the boy was better; he had a strong will to live, a stronger will to survive.

"I don't doubt it either." Dream remains worried, though. He does not think he will ever *not* be worried for the boy, after finding out the details of his documents. (The exact ones that state his cause of death will be due to the hands of himself, George, and Sapnap.) Since then, Dream keeps an eye on Theseus and ensures his safety is prioritized.

Today had been a mishap; today should not have happened.

George reads his mind. “He held himself well, apart from the injury. He didn’t need us to be there.”

“I know but—”

“He has you, but he also has himself.” George interrupts. “He’s fifteen, soon sixteen. Let him be sixteen, let him experience what we couldn’t.” *Let him have the freedom*, George asks for silently. He hopes Theseus may live without the control and limitations that they abided by for their entire lives.

“I guess so,” Dream breathes out and the air turns white from the cold. They decide to take Theseus back to the house, to ensure he does not get sick from the cold. Dream nudges Theseus’ shoulder, but he does not wake up. His breathy murmurs indicate he is deep into unconsciousness. George chuckles lightly, raising his eyebrows in Dream’s direction.

Dream rolls his eyes and pulls Theseus up, carrying him back to their residence. If a Teacher or someone from The Academy had seen them then, they both would have gotten into deep trouble. Theseus more than Dream, as Dream is valued, and Theseus has not yet proved his total worth.

It does not matter too much anymore, though. Dream can ruffle Theseus’ hair without hesitation, and they can poke fun and laugh at each other’s jokes once they leave.

They return to the house, and George opens the door for them. Dream places Tommy down on his bed and although he plans to fall asleep too, George turns back to the front door, heading outside again. Dream reluctantly follows, locking the door behind him, his eyes lingering on the door with a slight reluctance.

“Where are we going?” Dream asks.

“The festival, let’s check it out.”

Dream scoffs. “You told Theseus it was too dangerous.”

“It is,” George smirks. “We’ll bring him something back as an apology then. Are you coming?”

Dream sighs, but follows him through the empty roads, towards the direction of the noise. Their hands stay by their side as their steps align, and their fingers touch each other’s momentarily before they move away. Dream’s cheeks heat, he blames it on the weather.

The town is alive. There is a large campfire and decorations hanging on houses and stores. People are dressed head to toe with colors. They have smiles and dance in circles. There are children here as well, even though the time approaches midnight.

Dream and George stand to admire. A man passes by, and George reaches out to ask him a question, his curiosity taking hold of him. “What’s this for?”

The man sends him an odd expression. George further explains himself. “We’re visiting for a few days, and we weren’t aware there was a festival.”

“Oh,” The man nods his head slowly, in understanding. His smile is light and joyful. “For independence!” He cheers.

George blinks. “What?”

They ask a few others. “Freedom,” another says. “Liberty!”

They walk through the streets, and a man stumbles towards them with two glasses. "Happy hundred years!" He cheers and Dream understands then. What surrounds them is a celebration of the town's anniversary, of independence of some sort. Dream and George are trained in all areas of academics, yet history may be a difficult subject due to the various pieces of information throughout the globe. Long stories and collections that belong to each country and continent, that it is hard for their Teachers to keep up with and teach them.

Dream and George take the glasses, filled with what smells to be liquor. The man cheers again and introduces his name. "I work at the pub down the street. I haven't seen your faces around 'ere but you're welcome there. All your friends are." He adds, quieter, "I'm sure there are some that would like to meet ya." He jabs his thumb behind him, before sauntering away.

Dream's eyes trail behind the man, to where a group of girls sits on chairs with drinks in their hands. They smile when Dream notices them.

George grabs his arm quickly and Dream's eyes return to him. "Let's go."

"What?" Dream asks.

"We're leaving." He no longer sounds as curious as before, rather more aggravated. It is unusual, as George remains resigned and does not display such emotion regularly.

"It was your idea," Dream tells him.

"It's late."

They leave the celebrations as they return back. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong," George responds fast.

"Something is wrong," He pulls George's arm back, slowly connecting the dots between George's sudden behavior and the previous events. He understands quickly, and tells him with a small smile, "You know that there is one person I can call my partner."

"Sapnap."

"You." Dream rolls his eyes because George can be dense sometimes. "Even when we leave, even when you've left as well. We are partners."

"Okay," George says softly before they stare at the stars. He swallows. "Dream,"

"Yeah?"

"When we leave," he says and closes his eyes. "Watch the stars with me."

George's name rests on Dream's lips. Perhaps he will whisper George's name back to him one day, underneath the watchful gaze of the moon and the stars. Perhaps he will say *yes*.

Until then, they may basket the warmth of each other and the short time of freedom that they have left until the morning. Maybe one day, when they are truly free, they can lie down on a grassy field and feel alive again. Until then, they listen to the sound and music, and laughter of the town, and picture a future life when they can finally be happy together.

Dream, a voice echoes in his dreams. When we leave, watch the stars with me.

“Tommy,” George decides.

Dream looks up, frowning. “Hm?”

“The name suits him,” He glances at the boy. “His name can be Tommy when you leave.”

“Tommy,” Dream tests the name once, and then twice. He shrugs his shoulders and writes it down.

“Now we need a name for you.” George thinks, and smirks. “How about George?”

“No,” Sapnap denies, slamming his hand down on the paper when they are going through lists of information and documents later that day. “Your name will *not* be George.”

“How come?” George mutters.

“It’s a horrible name.”

George snaps back, “Sapnap isn’t too great either.” They bicker and pull each other to the mats where they duel. No knives, only fists. They do not fight each other to hurt, they fight to prove a point.

Dream lays back in his chair, his eyes fluttering close. He hears George’s remarks and Sapnap’s laughter and he knows he will miss this.

Chapter End Notes

thank you everyone for waiting!

exams are finally over so i have more time to write now. this chapter was so long so i hope this compensates the lack of updates.

the storyline is slowly moving and there's a lot more to come
thanks for reading <3

comment on this chapter and maybe ill try and update faster haha

Mistake

Chapter Summary

“I could start the shakes again,” Dream then offers.

“Yeah, no thanks.”

Sapnap pipes up, “I was actually starting to enjoy them.”

“Shakes?” Philza interrupts them with both eyebrows raised.

“Protein shakes,” Dream explains. “Just to make sure we had a balanced breakfast.”
Purpled scoffs at that statement, Sapnap flicks his shoulder.

“What?” Purpled mutters. “You were torturing Tommy with the gross drink.”

Chapter Notes

reread last chapter in case you've forgotten whats happening
sorry for the wait :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There are four of them.

The words ring in George’s head.

Four of them have been experimented on. He wonders if that means there are four that are immortal – four who will last forever.

He is one of them. He refuses to accept the fact that Dream, Sapnap, or Theseus are any of the remaining three. It cannot be possible – he does not want to believe it.

George searches his mind. He does not recall either of them sharing the oddly straight scars or inexplicable bruises that he holds. Neither does he remember a time when any of them had gone missing for days without explanation. They had their fair share of missions, but George had usually accompanied them.

“Dream was one,” Eight mutters numbly. They stay in one of the guest suites at Willow Academy. Night approaches and they must wait for the early morning to begin training and planning with the Head. “He was perfect, Graduate One. He had to be one of them.”

“No,” George responds lightly. “He couldn’t be.”

George knows Sapnap well but the person he knows the best in the world is Dream. Dream would have told him; Dream wouldn’t have kept the experiments a secret.

He wonders to himself then, why hadn't *he* told Dream? *Why had he kept the experiments a secret from him?*

They all have their secrets, George supposes. Perhaps this was one of Dream's.

"Why not?" Eight responds. "He was the model, and everyone had been expected to live up to his standard."

George would agree with Eight, but he experiences something with Dream years ago. A near-death event. The memory flashes through his mind: he remembers a cliff, rocks, and blood. He remembers Dream struggling to breathe, and how he had clung onto his stomach, watching George as if it were to be the last time he would live again.

George is immortal, as the testing had worked. If Dream had been a subject to the experiments too, he wouldn't have been so close to death. George wouldn't have to reassure him that he would live. Dream wouldn't need saving.

"If you're so sure then," Eight sighs when George does not agree. "Then give me an answer. I'm thinking logically."

George exhales, closing his eyes. For once, he truly does not know. And maybe, he decides he does not want to.

They move into the safe house a week after they relocate to the *Syndicate*.

The mission is a few days away, Tommy almost counts. He refuses to believe it is, and ignores the statement, locking it at the back of his mind. Instead, he focuses on the sight in front of him. Philza had mentioned it was a 'safe house' but the location is wide and the house is huge. It is more of a mansion than anything else, with a tall black gate bordering them inside. Large windows are covered, and each room is double the size of the ones from Quackity's apartment.

"Make yourselves at home," Philza nods his head in their direction. Although it is a huge area, there are quite a number of others with them. Who remains is Tommy, his brothers, Karl, Antfrost, Purpled, and Slime. There is also Philza, Technoblade and Wilbur, and more of their agents; about twenty.

(Tommy remembers their faces from months ago, back at the breakfast place. He had gone with Dream for food, and bumped into them.)

He matches names to faces when Philza introduces them earlier. Awesam, Jack and Puffy, and a few others. Tommy had avoided Tubbo as much as possible back at the agency, although it did not prove to be too difficult as he had forced himself into training and spent his days with Dream, Purpled, Antfrost, and Sapnap.

Tubbo, Niki, and Ranboo will arrive at the safe house the day after. Tommy is informed they are

still working on relocating all the agents to a large location before the mission. It will be the last of the agent's training, which proves to be difficult as there are many of them. Then, Tommy knows facing Tubbo will be unpreventable; he cannot hide from him when he finally arrives at the safe house.

"I'm taking this room!" Purpled shouts from somewhere in the house. Tommy hears Antfrost respond after him, "You have to share, there aren't enough!"

Tommy rolls his eyes, moving through the corridors silently. The doors that are closed are taken. He blames Dream's slow driving for putting him in this predicament as all the better rooms have been taken. He wants a moment to himself after a long car ride of Karl's bad singing and horrible radio music.

Tommy eventually finds an empty room at the back of the hallway. As soon as he is about to dump his duffel bag on one of the beds, Sapnap and Karl come charging into the room, on each other's heels as they run into the door, shoving each other in the process.

Tommy scowls. "Fuck off, this is mine."

Sapnap shakes his head. "Sorry Tommy, we were here first."

Tommy narrows his eyes. "No, you weren't."

"Older brother privileges," Sapnap smirks. "Sorry, kid. Now move."

"There's only one bed here," Tommy points at the obvious. It is a double bed with white sheets. There is a nice view of the forest and landscape outside, he won't relent and give it up quickly.

"I know," Sapnap says slowly, waiting for Tommy to come to his senses. When Tommy does, he scrunches his nose in distaste before he grabs his bag and shoves Sapnap out of the way to find another room. As he steps into the hallway, he hears Sapnap's laugh behind him, followed by Karl's words, "That wasn't very nice of you, Sap."

Tommy sighs, searching the rooms again. He finds Purpled in one, and his headphones are in as he stares at the roof. Antfrost shares a room with him, but he sleeps on a second bed by the balcony. Tommy frowns and continues searching.

He ends up finding out there is only one room left, with two beds across the bedroom from one another. He shrugs his shoulders, taking it. All Tommy wants to do is sleep, he refuses to do anything else. He throws his bags onto the floor and takes his shoes off by his bed. Then he places his knives down, one by his bedside table and another under his pillow. He also unstraps the one tied around his ankle, to avoid stabbing himself as he goes to sleep.

His plans are ruined, however, when the door opens, and a man rushes into the room, his eyes on his phone.

"What are you doing here?" Tommy narrows his eyes. His name is Jack, and he knows because of his distinct features – namely his lack of hair, and sharp jawline.

"What do you mean?" The guy questions and tosses his bag onto the bed. "I'm sleeping here."

"No, you aren't," Tommy snaps. "Find somewhere else."

"Sorry kid," Jack shrugs and Tommy knows that it will not be hard to hate him. "There's no other room. There are only two other rooms but those are reserved for Tubbo, Ranboo, and Niki."

“You’re not sleeping here.”

“I’m on the other side of the room!” Jack yells. His voice is as annoying as his face, Tommy thinks and glares. “I guess you’ll ‘ave to deal with it.”

Tommy grabs his knife from the bedside table. He hadn’t known it would come in hand, but apparently so.

Jack grins at the weapon. “Throw it, I dare you. Philza will just take it away again.”

Tommy throws it. He aims for Jack’s eye, but the man dodges it in time and the blade tears into the wall. Jack yelps, and shouts. “What the fuck, man?! You could have killed me!”

“I’m getting rusty,” Tommy lies because he isn’t. His skills haven’t topped his days at The Academy, but his aim is perfect and he’s getting damn close to how it used to be. “I won’t miss next time.”

At the noise, three people rush into the room. Dream, Wilbur, and Puffy. Dream throws Jack a glare as he enters the room with Wilbur while Puffy stands back by the doorframe to watch. “What’s going on in here?”

“He threw a knife at me!” Jack shouts, pointing at the blade lodged into the wall. Dream’s eyes snap to Tommy. Jack continues, “Wilbur, you need to tell your dad to lock away these things from the kid. He’ll keep tearing holes into the walls.”

Tommy’s eyes are heat. He glares at Wilbur with disbelief lacing in his tone. “Philza told him?”

Wilbur stammers, “No,” He sends a pointed look at Jack. “Shut up.”

“Can you hear yourself? I almost died!”

“You’re forgetting we’re going on a mission soon,” Tommy tells him. “I was preparing you.”

“We’re on the same side!”

“Not anymore, bitch,” Tommy grumbles.

“Tommy,” Dream’s voice is strict suddenly. Tommy’s eyes snap to his, and Dream has his ‘big brother’ face plastered on his features. “Apologize.”

“What the fuck, man?” Tommy responds. He rolls his eyes when Dream keeps his unimpressed expression. “Sorry for throwing a knife at you Jack, even though you deserved it.”

“That was a shit apology, mate.”

“It’s the best you’re going to get.”

Wilbur stops the conversation from escalating. “Jack, stop it. Can you guys share a room without fighting?”

“No,” Tommy states. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” Wilbur does not know that Tommy cannot share a room with someone he cannot trust. He cannot even sleep alone without the doors locked tight. His habits have changed over time after leaving The Academy, but this is one that remains.

“I can’t,” Tommy repeats.

Dream places a hand on his shoulder. “It’s fine, we can swap, I have a room to myself.”

“You can’t either,” Tommy sighs. Dream may not admit it now, but he’ll get no sleep with Jack here. He may be able to take down Jack in a heartbeat, but the agents refuse to display their vulnerability from unconsciousness with someone they are not aware of. Dream and Tommy have only just met Jack, they don’t know him well. Then there is Sapnap and Karl, who might as well be married. There is trust required, and a layer of understanding is needed.

“There are no other spares,” Jack points out. “I’ve checked twice.”

“It’s fine,” Puffy then steps forward into the room. She crosses her arms over her chest. “Niki and I can share a room. You can take her room, Tommy.”

“Oh,” Tommy bites his tongue. “Thanks,”

“No problem,” She smiles, and they disperse. Wilbur lingers a moment longer, his eyes reaching Tommy. He hesitates and leaves after.

Dream and Tommy move to Puffy’s room, but Tommy does not forget to glare at Jack as he leaves the bedroom. Jack rolls his eyes in response, turning away.

“You can’t go threatening Philza’s agents,” Dream murmurs to Tommy as they follow Puffy. They speak in French.

“Watch me,” Tommy responds.

“Tommy,” Dream warns. “We are with Philza’s team, not against them.”

“I know,” Tommy says. “You think I don’t know that?”

“I’m not telling you to trust them, but at least try and get along with them.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Tommy’s old classmates did not get along with him. They hated that the Graduates’ eyes were on him. They hated how he was the predicted fourth, that he was faster and smarter than they were. They never got along, but they remained strong. Tommy doesn’t require anyone to like him, he learns once.

“It does,” Dream says as if this is an important conversation they have held off for long. As if Tommy will actually listen to him. “I know we are used to not receiving help, but we have help now.” They lower their voices when Puffy turns her head at them when their voices grow louder. They walk down the stairs and turn into the hallway of her room. “We’re not alone, we can rely on others.”

“Wait until Sapnap hears the shit you’re saying,” Tommy grumbles.

“He’ll agree with me,” But Dream sounds slightly unsure. “Just – *fuck* – don’t think this is a responsibility on your shoulders. We’re all holding this burden of taking The Academy down. You don’t need to prove something or act against your capabilities because you think you’re alone. You’re not.”

“I know. I have you. And Sapnap.”

“It’s good that you know that. But now we have an agency to rely on, properly trained agents. It

isn't like previous missions when it was just us four." *Dream, George, Sapnap, and you.* "We have others with us."

Tommy knows that. But he is trained by The Academy and Philza and his agents will not understand the brutality of The Academy until they face them themselves. Similar to how they will never truly understand Tommy's past, as they have not witnessed it themselves.

"Here's my room," Puffy pushes open the door, interrupting their conversation. She grabs her unpacked bags, most likely about to move to the room she will share with Niki due to the rearrangements. "I'll leave you guys alone to finish your conversation."

When she leaves, closing the door, Tommy chuckles, "I hope she isn't French."

"She isn't," Dream sighs. "I did a background check on all of them. Techno knows some Greek apparently and some of the agents know Spanish." Dream informs him, so they will avoid using those languages if they want to be discrete with their words.

"Thanks," Tommy nods. His eyes travel around the plain room. It is smaller but has a good view. He also notices a lock on the door, which may mean he will get a better night's rest. "You can leave now."

"We're not done with our conversation," Dream reminds him. "We're talking about this later."

"Sure, we are," Tommy rolls his eyes. "Is your room next to Sapnap and Karl's?"

"I think so, why?"

Tommy snickers. "Good luck tonight, then."

"They didn't tell us you were unkillable," Eight suddenly says.

George sighs and turns to him. They remain waiting and thinking.

"They told us to kill you," Eight explains. "When we found you, they wanted us to murder you. But that's impossible,"

George swallows. "Yeah." After the Head points out the scars on his arms, he has never felt so conscious. Eight keeps glancing at them as well.

"They set us up," Eight says. "I was meant to die if you hadn't let me team with you."

"Yeah," George says lightly. "But I don't think they realized I ended like this."

"What?" Eight's eyebrows frown. "Of course they realized, they tested on you."

"I don't think they realized the extent of the testing and what it did to me," George corrects his words. "I think they realized the testing helped with my agility and form, but my..." *Immortality.* "My *nature*—" he says instead. "—wasn't known. Maybe they figured it out later, but if they truly

knew, they would have used me more in missions. There would also be more than four of us. If I worked, they would have applied the testing on everyone.”

“I wonder why they stopped on four,” Eight agrees. “Four of us, yet they didn’t go on.”

George freezes.

“You’d expect them to,” Eight continues. “They’re related to the Government; you’d fucking expect them to think harder – smarter. I don’t know where their critical thinking skills went.”

“Eight,” George says slowly.

Eight ignores him. “They could have made everyone immortal. Dream, Sapnap, and Theseus as well. Their dream team.”

“Eight,” George repeats slowly. Eight turns to him. “You said ‘*us*’.”

“*Four of us, yet they didn’t go on.*”

“*Us*,” George repeats. “Us?”

“It was a slip of tongue,”

“It wasn’t,” George denies and looks at Eight's arms. He searches for straight scars, a confirmation that Eight is once in his shoes.

(As George thinks – it begins to make sense. They know George is immortal, so they bring someone else who is similar, to him. They let them fight, to see who reigns as champion. To see if their testing works and if The Academy has found the perfect recipe.

It is all just another test to them.)

Maybe Eight realizes the same thing. Maybe he doesn’t. He bolts out of the room, and George follows him.

“Eight!” George calls, jogging up to Eight who rushes through the hallway.

“Get the fuck away from me!”

“*Stop.*”

Eight keeps running. George groans and picks up his pace. Eight attempts to run for the elevator, but George leaps, shoving him against the wall. He breathes quickly, making sure Eight cannot move.

“Eight,” George exhales. “*Foolish.*”

“Don’t,” Eight grits his teeth, looking away.

George struggles as Eight tries to lift his arms away from where George has pinned him to the wall. He attempts to elbow his stomach and kick his feet but George does not move from where his arms are wrapped around him. Eight could not move if he tried.

(There are four of them have been tested.

George.

Eight.

There are two left.)

“You were him,” George wonders. “You were the boy I remembered.”

He dreams of white walls and glass between. He remembers a boy on another bed, whose eyes are closed, but his words are clear.

(“Graduate Two,” he whispers.)

“George,” Eight struggles against the hold.

“It’s okay,” George reassures him. “We’ll take them down.” For me. For you.

Eight swallows, his eyes flickering quickly. His joints are tense, but George cannot let go, as he does not know if Eight will attempt to escape again.

But Eight’s words are different, not close to the conversation they are having.

“I made a mistake,” he blurts out. “I betrayed you. I brought The Academy here, they know we’re here.”

The color drains from George’s face. “What?” His hands fall to his side in shock.

“I’m sorry,” Eight apologizes quickly, his eyes widening with the realization. He stares at his hands. “I called them. They know you’re here, and they’re coming for you.”

Someone knocks on Tommy’s door. He closes his eyes, wondering if the noise will disappear if he does not respond. But the person keeps knocking, and Tommy opens an eye. “Dream?”

“It’s Wilbur,” the voice says.

Tommy sighs and sits up. “Come in,” Wilbur pushes the door open awkwardly, his nervous eyes glancing around the room before they settle on him.

“Hey,” he says lightly.

Tommy raises an eyebrow, “Do you need something?” Dinner should not be for a couple of hours, and Tommy speaks to Philza only moments prior, about training and mission updates, so Wilbur can’t be here on Philza’s behalf – so Tommy is curious as to why he is here then.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Wilbur sighs. “About before.”

Tommy’s eyes flicker away. “Nothing happened before.”

“Why couldn’t you share a room with Jack?”

Tommy contemplates how he will respond. Because Wilbur already knows enough about The Academy, and it isn't too big of a secret to hide anymore. Months ago, Tommy would rather chop his leg off than tell Wilbur his secrets. Now, he doesn't think he cares. Not as much. Not when Wilbur has seen him at his most vulnerable, not when Tommy's fate is sealed in a few days anyway.

"I can't sleep in a room with someone I don't trust," Tommy responds hollowly. "The door needs to be locked and I need to be alone." He does not add that Sapnap or Dream, and once George, could be in the same room as him. He trusts them.

But Wilbur latches onto his first sentence, understanding. "So, someone you trust can be with you? Dream and Sapnap?"

And George, Tommy would have added if the circumstances were different. If George was still alive. "I guess so."

Wilbur exhales. His question has been answered but he does not make an attempt to leave the room yet.

It is because he has more to say. And he says it. "I hate that *they* did this to you." *The Academy*, Wilbur can't say the name. The words burn his tongue, stopping him.

Tommy shrugs his shoulders. "It's not the worst they've done." There is the white room and punishments. The drowning exercises and cruel lessons. Burned palms and scarred arms. There is much worse than his sleeping arrangements.

"I hate all of it," Wilbur says. "I hate that they did this to you. And that I couldn't do anything to stop it."

"You could have done something," Tommy whispers. "You could have stopped them."

"We couldn't do anything, Tommy. If we could, we would have stopped them." Wilbur's words are furious.

"You let them take me."

"We didn't let them do anything, they did it. They *took* you."

"They told us," Tommy says when the room turns horribly tense. "That our parents didn't want us, that no one did except them. That being an agent was our purpose."

"We wanted you, Philza didn't stop searching for years."

"But he did."

"We lost hope," Wilbur pauses. "And then we found it again."

"What?" Tommy glares.

"Phil's been searching for Theseus for so long. You're Tommy now, but he has hope that you'll remember. If it isn't today, then it might be tomorrow. One day. But he doesn't mind waiting because you're here and safe."

Not for long, Tommy thinks. Hope is fake because he will die in the mission in a few days. He prepares for it physically, perhaps not mentally, though. He will risk it all for his brothers because

Tommy must prove that The Academy was wrong, and he is more than they make of him.

“Tommy,” Wilbur says slowly. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Tommy stammers, moving away from his thoughts. “Why wouldn’t I be? Fuck off.”

“I don’t know,” Wilbur pauses. “You just had a look in your eyes... I don’t know.”

“You don’t know,” Tommy confirms. “Get lost.” His words aren’t harsh, though. They’re empty.

Wilbur chuckles. The mood is no longer tense. Maybe it is, maybe they just pretend it isn’t. “The more that I think about it, the more I wonder how I didn’t realize it sooner. That when you acted as Theseus, you were Tommy the whole time.”

“I wasn’t *acting* as anyone,” Tommy frowns. “I was myself.”

“You were different,” Wilbur notes. “You were reserved, harder to speak to. I should have realized.”

“Whatever,” Tommy grunts.

“You remind me of Theseus more every day,” Wilbur leans on the wall by his door.

“What?” A feeling runs up Tommy’s spine and his mouth turns dry. “What are you talking about?”

“Before you were taken, when you were *our* Theseus,” Wilbur is quiet. “The way you talk, your eyes.” His eyes rise. “Your hair.” Tommy’s hand subconsciously moves to his curls. “Your brown hair, it was harder to recognize you since you’re blond.” Tommy has not rebleached his hair, so his brown roots grow. Not at a rapid rate, but steady enough for Tommy to find an issue in it.

Wilbur eventually leaves and Tommy moves to the mirror in the bathroom. He studies his face, his small scars, and the bruises on his chin and forehead. He watches his blue eyes and light freckles. He then stares at his brown hair roots and sees *Theseus* flash in front of him.

Sixteen.

He is not Sixteen. He is not him anymore.

(He attempts to change his appearance when they leave. He gets a nose piercing and lets his hair grow long.

It does not work; the same hollow expression glares back at him.)

Tommy barges into Dream’s room. Dream glances up fast, with worry. He’s leaning on his bed, scrolling on his phone but his full attention is now on the boy.

Tommy interrupts before Dream’s worried words escape his mouth. “Can you dye my hair again?”

“What?” Dream furrows his eyebrows. “Now?”

“Now,” Tommy confirms.

Dream might understand. He might not. But it doesn’t matter because he stands anyway, ruffling Tommy’s hair as he passes him to leave the room. Tommy predicts he does understand, because maybe his brown hair is more noticeable, and perhaps Dream sees more Theseus in Tommy than he used to.

The hair dye isn't difficult to find. It is stashed in the back drawers in the downstairs bathroom. Philza tells them that it is a home they live in for a couple of months a year. The dye must belong to Technoblade whose hair is not naturally pink.

There is bleach and dye. Dream grabs it. He's done it once; he can do it again.

"And you want to do this now?" He glances at Tommy again.

Tommy watches his figure in the mirror again. (He is meant to be their fourth. He is an agent and fails in their testing. He fails in becoming what they want him to be.)

"I'm sure," Tommy does not doubt, and Dream begins.

A few hours later, bickering and pinching, Tommy's hair is as blond as months prior. His brown roots are no longer seen, and he is just *Tommy*.

Philza calls them through the intercom for dinner. The speaker is attached to the wall in each room, due to the size of the place. Dream puts the boxes away and Tommy finishes drying his damp hair with a stained towel. He feels fresh, he feels alive. He tries to not let it show, but Dream notices his mood change.

"Looks good," Dream nods with a small smile, admiring his work.

"Would have been better if you didn't mess up the back."

Dream shoves his shoulder playfully in retaliation. With an eye-roll, he says, "Let's go down for dinner, we don't want to keep the rest waiting."

Dream and Tommy do keep them waiting because everyone is seated, plates and pots and pans decorated on the table. There are two empty seats in front of Sapnap and Karl.

"Dream, Tommy," Philza announces, and all eyes turn to them. "The last to join." Dream apologizes and Tommy avoids eyes as he sits down. He feels Wilbur's stare, the disbelief, and shadows in his eyes.

"Your hair," Sapnap notices first, with a smile. "Nice, kid."

"Looks good," Karl also says, and Tommy thanks him with a mumble. Purpled nods at Tommy, and Antfrost mutters in his ear. Other agents barely pay him attention, whispering with one another.

Philza tells everyone to begin serving themselves and Tommy dares to glance at Wilbur. It is not one of his greatest decisions as Wilbur's reaction is not pleasant. His lips are parted, and his eyes are wide. He does not expect the change, not anticipating Tommy to take such a statement about his hair to an extreme measure. But Tommy's been meaning to change his hair and Wilbur's words push him over the edge. So maybe it is the older's fault.

Dream grabs Tommy's plate when Tommy appears to be in a silent stance. "You need carbs and protein," Dream tells him. "As much as you can. A good diet will help." His words remind Tommy of an instance back at The Academy when Dream had told Sapnap and George countless times that a good diet was needed and that their meal plans were justified as greens and chicken produced the best results.

"Thanks," Tommy exhales when Dream places the plate down. He still isn't used to eating with people who aren't Dream and Sapnap. Tommy does not realize he misses such normal day-to-day

circumstances until he is faced with differences. The Academy drives consistency into them, it is difficult to push past such teachings.

“I could start the shakes again,” Dream then offers.

“Yeah, no thanks.”

Sapnap pipes up, “I was actually starting to enjoy them.”

“Shakes?” Philza interrupts them with both eyebrows raised.

“Protein shakes,” Dream explains. “Just to make sure we had a balanced breakfast.” Purpled scoffs at that statement, Sapnap flicks his shoulder.

“What?” Purpled mutters. “You were torturing Tommy with the gross drink.”

Philza ignores Purpled’s comment. “I do agree that a healthy diet is key to high performance,” Tommy wonders if this is the first time that Philza and Dream have agreed on something. “Is that something they established at The Academy?”

The air is almost knocked out of Tommy’s lungs. He does not expect the question, nor does he expect Philza to bring up such a topic so casually. Everyone tippy toes around the subject, they don’t mention it, afraid that Tommy will break.

Tommy does not break, of course, he doesn’t, a simple question does not affect him that much.

“Yes,” Sapnap coughs into his fist. He picks up his fork again, “We had repetitive meals, they made sure we ate consistently.”

“Did you have cooks?” Karl asks Sapnap with curiosity.

“We had food delivered to the grounds and certain Teachers would take responsibility for catering,” Sapnap responds. More questioning glances turn to them, likely as the topic holds the interest of most.

“Did you eat together?” Technoblade asks, his turn to ask a question.

Sapnap shoves food in his mouth, so Dream answers. “Age groups had an allocated eating time with each other. Graduates could choose.”

“We ate with the kid,” Sapnap nods at Tommy. “He stole our desserts when we did. Shameless, with it.” Tommy contemplates throwing his salad at Sapnap. The slice of tomato on his plate would match his shirt. But Philza’s eyes remain on him, so he avoids doing so in the meantime.

“Do you think they still continue the same practices?” Philza asks. “If they follow the same principle, then we could make something work.”

Tommy glances at Dream, whose eyes circulate with thoughts. “Sapnap and I were exceptions I meant, only we could choose. The rest of the Graduates ate before all age groups begin their meals.”

“You’re changing your words,” Technoblade points out. “You said prior that all Graduates could choose.”

“Only Sapnap and I.” He does not mention George. It is not needed, not when none of them know of his existence.

“Why were you exceptions?” Technoblade narrows his eyes.

“We were the best, we were given more privileges,” Sapnap smirks. Not cockily, maybe a little.

“It’s not something we particularly enjoy bringing up,” Dream narrows his eyes.

“We could execute the plan around an earlier time instead of around later hours,” Philza thinks. “If we can separate the Graduates, our jobs can be easier as they are the greatest match for our agents currently.”

Tommy knows they are not a match. The Graduates go through years of pain and lessons. They may never perform to the same standard as Dream and Sapnap, but they have far more experience and technique than Philza and Quackity’s agents. He does not say this out loud though, he keeps the truth hidden because Tommy knows Dream will admit this statement to Philza later on.

But Purpled is blunt and brutally honest. “Easier? The Academy’s agents, even the young twelve-year old’s could beat your agents at a fistfight. No offense.” Purpled clearly means to offend him. Antfrost knocks his shoulder, glaring at him.

“Our agents have undergone weeks of intense training and have years of experience. It is because of them that we have a remote chance of succeeding.” Philza states and the table falls silent. Some may disagree, like Purpled, though others will agree with his words. Tommy knows that their plan must be perfect. If they want to succeed, they cannot make a singular mistake.

Philza had discussed their plan before. They will attack, they will not kill. They will take out the agents and corner the Headmaster. They will kill them if they must. The children will not be harmed, the same cannot be applied to Teachers and Assessors.

Conversation picks up again when one of Philza’s agents, Awesam, brings up how good the food is. Talking commences, only quieter than before.

Tommy pushes his food around. He thinks of George and his sacrifice. He wonders if George had hesitated before saving Sapnap and burning along with The Academy. He wonders if he, himself will hesitate too.

(Tommy knows The Academy wants him. They want him dead, they have one hundred thousand dollars over his head, after all. They don’t value him over Dream and Sapnap. So, he will let them have him and prove that although the testing may not have worked, he will die stronger than they ever were alive.)

“Eat up,” Dream nudges him, helping his own plate to seconds. “We will train tonight in the gym. You can’t have an empty stomach.” To satisfy Dream, Tommy shoves a spoonful of mashed potatoes in his mouth. Dream rolls his eyes. He is about to ruffle Tommy’s hair to piss him off, but his hands freeze in the air.

Tommy follows Dream’s direction of eyesight to Philza. At first, he is confused however the realization soon dawns upon him. Dream is worried Philza will react negatively. The Academy did not allow them to touch, to hug, or ruffle each other’s hair. No physical touch unless it was to hit or a punch or to hurt. Dream is momentarily unsure in front of him.

Tommy knows Philza won’t do anything. Dream has to remind Tommy they are not there anymore, but sometimes, Tommy has to give his older brother the same reminder.

“Don’t touch my hair,” he teases, and Dream unfreezes. “Don’t ruin it.”

The rest of their meal goes by quickly. Tommy finishes his plate, and they head downstairs to work out at the gym. It is Dream, Sapnap, Purpled, and Tommy there. Antfrost stays momentarily before he goes back upstairs to fall asleep. But the four former assassins have unmatched stamina. Although Purpled leaves The Academy before them, there are teachings and lessons that will never leave him.

They do weights and then spar. Dream and Sapnap fight, while Tommy goes up against Purpled.

Dream beats Sapnap. Dream does not lose.

Tommy and Purpled then spar. Although Purpled is good competition, Tommy has a few extra years on him. Years of experience and grueling standards and expectations of living up to those before him. For a long time, Tommy sweats and bleeds and fights until he cannot handle it. And when he can't, he is forced to stand up and continue. Tommy wins, pulling up Purpled from the floor when he is knocked down.

"You're good," Purpled accepts his hand to pull himself up. "Maybe better than Sapnap."

"No," Sapnap denies. "In his dreams."

"A year," Tommy announces. "And I'll beat him."

"Cocky, are we?"

"My middle name," Tommy confirms. Dream scoffs at Tommy, throwing a towel at him.

"Me against you," Sapnap stares at Tommy. "If you'll beat me in a year's time, surely you can get close now."

"Sapnap," Dream warns.

"What?" Sapnap asks innocently. "We did back at The Academy." At the end of lessons, as the sun would sleep, Sapnap and Tommy would begin fighting on the mats. They threw punches to the stomach and Tommy almost lost a tooth once. Dream or George breaks them apart, but Sapnap wins.

Tommy holds a confidence now, he did not before. Although he is not drilled with the same daily lessons he had once been accustomed to, he thinks he feels different. He does not survive to live, not like he used to. Tommy does not fight because he must. It is a choice.

"You're on," Tommy agrees.

"Dream, you can go against Purpled," The two former agents snap their eyes in each other's direction. Purpled tenses. "Or not?" Sapnap says with a pause when neither of them makes a notion to move.

Sapnap and Tommy stand on opposite sides of the large mat. They nod at each other.

"No weapons?" Sapnap asks.

"No," Dream quickly interrupts. "No injuries before the mission."

"You're spoiling our fun," Tommy frowns, but they begin.

Sapnap's fighting style is unique, unlike Dream and George's. He is fierce, he is a force. There is a fire in his eyes and his hands when he fights. He pushes his body forward and begins his attack by

throwing a quick up. His movements are swift and unpredictable. Although he may not be precise as George or as technical as Dream, he is almost unbeatable.

Tommy dodges his attack. He pulls down, jumping off the group as he rounds behind Sapnap. He claws his fingers into his back, kicking the back of his knees. Sapnap grabs his arms and uses his strength to pull Tommy sideways. Tommy's knives give him an advantage, but when the fight is purely fists, he is less confident, and less quick on his steps. He cannot rely on his instincts and must continue with Sapnap who is his element.

As they continue, Dream's voice can be heard in the background. He mutters to Purpled, but there are moments when he is shouting at them. They can't play too rough, Tommy notices how Sapnap doesn't use all his might. They can't hurt one another before they must give in their all during missions.

Sapnap punches Tommy's shoulder and jabs his left side. Tommy almost stumbles, but he is suddenly given the upper hand when he finds his footing and knocks Sapnap onto the floor with his elbows aiming toward his face. Sapnap's back is knocked against the mat, and he scowls, Tommy snickering as he realizes that his foot placement results in Sapnap's misbalance. They fight on the floor, pushing each other's stomachs, whilst gripping onto each other's feet to stop movement.

Then it gets tenser, as Sapnap realizes that Tommy may have the upper hand. If he holds back before, he does not hold back now, as they both fight for their lives, knocking, shoving, and pushing. Tommy gets kicked in the face and Sapnap groans as Tommy claws into his side.

Dream breaks them up eventually. He grabs the back of Sapnap's shirt and shoves him away, pulling him up. "That's enough," he announces, his voice signaling that he will not take a 'no' for an answer. He then grabs Tommy's arm, pulling him up. "What happened there?"

"The kid decided to play dirty,"

"That's not how you're meant to fight," Dream reprimands. Tommy's eyes flicker to Purpled, whose eyes flash. Tommy assumes this situation is not easy for him, as Purpled only remembers Dream as a cruel man who would lead lessons and used installed fear into all of them.

Dream tells off Tommy for looking away. "Tommy, listen." Tommy rolls his eyes. "Don't roll your eyes."

"We were messing around, Dream."

"No, you weren't," Dream frowns. "You were trying to beat him; that's not how you win, Sapnap."

"I know, I know,"

"You don't fight like that," Dream snaps. "You fight like how we've been taught. Precision, and technique. Not like that,"

Sapnap bats his arm away, scowling. "I don't understand why you're getting so angry."

"Because we cannot afford to be sloppy during the mission. We're not as strong as we were before, but we have to be if we want to win. They trained us to the point of graduation, to win we have to be perfect."

"Perfection isn't easy," Sapnap swallows. "Perfection isn't easy for me when I'm against someone like you."

Dream stares at him, not uttering another word.

(Tommy senses a silent tension. He notices it for years; it is not spoken about. Because although Sapnap graduates, and is given the title of Graduate Three, he will never live up to Dream; he will never be as perfect. Dream is prioritized as Graduate One, and Sapnap envies the title and presence he holds. He wants it, he fights for it.)

“You’re not against me,” Dream says slowly. “You’re *with* me.”

“Then fuck off, stop acting so high,” Sapnap glares. “Tommy and I were having fun. You didn’t need to get so angry.”

“Fine,” Dream suddenly says when all there is silence. Perhaps the conflict gets to him. “I’m sorry.” Dream does not sound sorry. Sapnap mutters a couple of words under his breath. He grabs his towel and bottle, before storming back upstairs. The three agents watch as he travels upstairs. It will take a while for him to calm down, time with Karl will help.

“I guess I’ll go too,” Purpled sighs, and leaves too. He will not fight Dream. Tommy knows he won’t.

Dream and Tommy end up alone. Dream exhales and Tommy looks away.

“Sapnap thinks I’m perfect, huh?” Dream stresses. “He couldn’t be more wrong.”

(Dream is Graduate One. Dream is perfection.)

“I failed in many ways,” Dream stares down. “I failed you; I couldn’t save you from the tests.”

“No one could save me,” Tommy reminds him. “No one knew.”

“If I was perfect, I could have convinced Sapnap and George to come with us. We could have all been free.” *We could have all been alive*, is what Dream wants to say. But he doesn’t because the words hurt too much to say aloud.

Dream sits down. Tommy sits down with him.

“No one expects you to be perfect. Not Sapnap,” Tommy tells him. “He thinks he needs to live up to you, that’s all. He looks up to you.”

“I don’t know why.”

“He’s not the only one.”

Dream looks at Tommy, who shrugs. “Who wouldn’t want to be like you? You’re strong.”

“Tommy,” Dream says.

“I needed to be strong to live,” Tommy says. “You helped me. If it weren’t for you, I don’t think I’d be alive.”

“Tommy,” Dream says again.

“You’re not perfect. No one is,” Tommy pauses. “They tried to make me perfect and failed. No one can live up to their expectations. They wanted us to be more than we already were. And sure, they visioned you as the best; undefeatable, Sapnap only wants to live up to what you are. We all do.”

“There’s nothing to live up to,” And for a second, Tommy thinks about his words carefully.

“What do you mean?” Tommy pauses. “What?”

“I need you to know,” Dream suddenly says. “If something happens in the mission, you’ll continue being strong.”

Tommy grows hot and bothered. His heart pounds against his chest and he feels lightheaded.

“What are you talking about, Dream?”

“Promise me.”

“No,” Tommy denies. “Don’t say shit like that like... like...” *Like you’re preparing for the worst. For death.*

“If something goes wrong, you’ll continue. You’ll live on,” Dream confirms. More for himself, than for anyone else. “You’ll live on with Sapnap, and you’ll be strong. You can keep living with Quackity, or you can move away with Sapnap. You’ll do something for yourself, Tommy. You’ll be free.”

“Dream,” Tommy snaps. “Nothing’s going to happen.”

To you, nothing is going to happen to you. Tommy chants the words in his mind, again and again.

“Tommy,” Dream says again. “You need to promise me.”

“Fine,” Tommy can’t hear him go on. “I fuckin’ promise. Are you happy?”

“Very.”

“But,” Tommy then says. “The same goes for you. You’ll go on if something happens to me.”

Dream barks out a cold laugh. “Nothing’s going to happen to you.”

“You don’t know that.” Tommy narrows his eyes.

“I won’t let anything happen. You’re my kid brother, I won’t allow it.”

Tommy stares at Dream. For years he is told that no one will care for him when his own family didn’t. But he sits with Dream and realizes how wrong The Academy is. Dream is willing to do so much for him. He hopes it does not hurt when Tommy saves his brothers. Dream has saved and helped him for long enough.

(A part of Tommy believes he deserves this.)

“I’m a lot of people’s kid brothers,” Tommy glances up at the ceiling, signaling the bodies on the floor above. “It’s funny.”

“What’s funny about it?” Dream raises his eyebrows.

“I don’t know,” Tommy shrugs. “Thinking that I had no one with me. Then finding out I have many.”

“You do,” Dream confirms. “You do.”

Gray watches Dream.

Dream floors a student and then slaps him.

When it is Gray's turn, Dream kicks his stomach and Gray falls to the floor. He does not cry when Dream hurts him.

He moves back in line. He stares as Dream repeats his movements to the students after him, and wonders how someone's eyes could be so cold. How a person could be filled with as much fury as him, as he complies with The Headmaster's demands to torment them until they can hardly walk. Gray knows that if he ever graduates, he will never get as low as this.

He wonders how Dream could be consumed with enough evil to do this. How anyone could be so willing to hurt others when they were in such a position not long ago.

Sapnap lays in bed with Karl. They have their arms wrapped around each other, and although Sapnap sweats from his training prior, Karl does not care. Maybe he does care a little bit, but he does not show it.

"He was Graduate One, the highest rank," Sapnap explains. "And he's not anymore, but he acts like he needs to satisfy the role still."

"Yeah?" Karl asks.

"Yeah," Sapnap confirms, gritting his teeth. "I could never compete with him. He was always smarter, always a better fighter. I tried to put in more effort, I trained much longer than he did for months. But The Headmaster only had eyes for him. They only saw him, and no one else."

"Really?"

"I tried to be perfect, I *tried*," Sapnap says quietly. "I tried to live up to him. But I could never be what he is."

"You don't need to be him," Karl reassures. "Dream doesn't expect that."

"I was Graduate Three. I was third. The third best. I can't be better than that, Karl." Sapnap mutters.

They close their eyes and rest with each other until night becomes day.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading <3
long chapter tldr; madness

lots going on. a lot will go on next chapter. i predict the mission will begin in the next couple chapters.

after the mission, we'll have a short healing/epilogue era ending all loose ties

there will be a satisfying ending i promise

End Notes

hey this is my first fiction on a03 :)
comments and kudos will be much appreciated!

i made a twitter account @pathicsoul pls follow :0

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!